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Price, Five Cents

FRANK MERRIWELL'S TIGERS

OR
WIPING OUT
THE RAILROAD WOLVES



BY
BURT L. STANDISH

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Wiping Out the Railroad Wolves.

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CHAPTER I.

THE INQUISITIVE STRANGER.

Frank Merriwell sat in the window of the rocking car and gazed out at the barren landscape which stretched away, dreary and desolate, to the low-line range of blue mountains a hundred miles distant. A cloud of dust rose from the unsettled road-bed and came in at the open windows of the car, covering everything with a grayish-brown coating that was suggestive of alkali. The copper sun seemed half burned out with its own heat, which had baked the whole world.

The car was crowded with passengers, and, in spite of the open windows, the atmosphere was almost foul. A motley looking crowd it was, made up mostly of chattering Italians, greasy negroes, and brawny Irish laborers. They were workmen on their way to take part in the construction of the new railroad which was pushing eastward through Central Sonora. These men were smoking rank pipes, chewing tobacco, ex-

pectorating in the aisles, swearing, laughing, singing, and jabbering ceaselessly.

The dust made little difference in Merriwell's appearance, for he was dressed in brown khaki, wore a cotton shirt, had a silk handkerchief loosely tied about his neck, and his head was crowned by a peaked Mexican hat. He looked like one who had prepared to rough it in that country.

Becoming wearied of the monotonous landscape, Merry drew a leather case from his pocket and opened it. From the case he took a paper, on which a map was neatly drawn. This map he studied for a few moments. It was no easy matter, for the rough road-bed caused the car to bounce and reel in a way that would have been distressing to a person of delicate nerves.

Suddenly Frank turned, and looked at his seatmate. He had become aware that the man was also scrutinizing that map.

Up to this time no words had passed between them since the slender blue-eyed man dropped into the seat

at Frank's side. He was a quiet-looking person, simply dressed in light-weight clothing and seemingly accustomed and callous to the discomforts of such a journey. He had long, slender hands, with astonishingly well-manicured nails. His flaxen mustache drooped a bit over the corners of his tightly closed, thin-lipped mouth.

Those lips parted a trifle as Frank gave him that look, betraying some regular, well-polished teeth, which were rather fine and a trifle pointed.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said, in a quite tone. "I couldn't help noticing such a fine piece of drawing. It's clever work. Did you do it?"

Merriwell refolded the map, and slipped it into the leather case.

"Yes, sir," he answered.

"It looked to me like a certain portion of Eastern Sonora. I take it that you're a surveyor. You're employed by the company, aren't you?"

"I'm not a surveyor," answered Frank, not quite pleased by the stranger's curiosity.

"Not locating engineer?"

"No."

"That's peculiar. I had an idea that every man traveling over the road at present was in some manner interested in it."

Now Frank Merriwell was keenly interested in that road, but he did not tell the inquisitive stranger so. Instead of that, he began asking a few questions himself.

"Then, of course, you're interested in the road, sir?" he said.

"In a way, yes."

"In what sort of a way?"

"Financially."

"Are you a capitalist or a prospective stockholder?"

"I haven't purchased any stock yet," answered the man, who seemed quite as cautious as Merriwell.

"But you intend to do so?"

"I may have thought of such a thing, but just now I have my doubts of the wisdom of it."

"Why so?"

"Of course you know about the troubles the company is having?"

"I've heard something about it."

"Yes; this road has encountered no end of difficulties. There's a question in my mind if it will ever be completed. Already it has cost more than twice the sum estimated for the building of the entire line, and it's not yet half done. I've decided to investigate on my own account, that I may know the actual situation. A man has to be careful in these days of graft and sucker-catching."

"Aren't the men back of this project responsible and finally able to put it through?" questioned Frank.

"I believe Watson Scott and his associates are regarded as thoroughly responsible," was the answer. "Still it's doubtful if they understood the difficulties they were going up against when they started to lay the rails of this road."

"Watson Scott?" said Frank questioningly. "Is he the man known in Wall Street as Old Gripper?"

"The same man."

"I understand he's never made a failure."

"Up to date he has not. I'm not saying he won't be successful in this piece of business. He's pretty old, though, and he expected his lieutenants to put the road through. They have proved incapable, and I understand that Scott himself is out here somewhere."

"What are some of the difficulties you speak of?"

"I have only a vague idea. I can't give you the particulars."

A man in the seat ahead of them now turned and dipped into the conversation. He was an Irishman, and looked like a person of some intelligence.

"My name is Casey," he said, by way of introduction. "I happen to know something about this matter you're sp'aking av. I'm a grading boss on the road. It's true, as ye mentioned, thot we've had the divvil's own time av it. These greasers are a worthless lot to dale wid. True it is from the head of the gover'mint of this State down to the meanest peon in the country. Sure I'd rather have one Irishman under me than fifty av these mongrels. It's a shlick crew we're taking through this time. We had to discharge about siven hundred of the greasers, and it was Barney Mulloy, the cleverest contractor on the road, who sint his partner north into the States, and me wid him, to pick up this gang."

"Barney Mulloy?" exclaimed Frank. "Barney Mulloy? Is he a contractor on this road?"

"Sure and he is. An' the best one of them all he is, too. Do you know him, sor?"

"I think I do," smiled Frank, who had been thrilled through at the mention of his old comrade's name.

CHAPTER II.

EPHRAIM GALLUP.

Casey seemed glad of a chance to talk.

"No man knows what the Mexican Gover'mint will do," he said. "One day they smile on ye, and next day they give ye a kick. They grant ye privileges, and thin they take them away from ye. But it's not the gover'mint thot's been after givin' us all our trouble. We know that the Sonora Railroad, which already runs from Nogales to Guymas, has its shlick little designs on this bit of road. At first, I've been told, the Sonora people were after encouraging the promoters av this road; but now they're acting like they meant to ruin the skame and thin put the whole outfit in their pockets."

"But, even wid the Sonora road agin' us, and the gover'mint jumpin' and dodgin' like a frisky flea, we'd pushed the thing through only for two of the divvil's own servants. One of those is a bad nut, and he's known from Mexico City to Manitoba as The Wolf. He's a gambler by profession, and he's been making

a shlick thing out av the bhoys. It's not often any one has iver set eyes on this man himself, whose real name is Tom Stockton, for he runs his business with a greaser at the head. The greaser is known as Mad Mendez, and he's a shnake if there iver was one.

"Mendez and about twenty card-sharps and gun-fighters have kipt at the head of construction iver since twenty miles of rail were laid. In the furst place, they started out modest enough in a little tint, wid a faro layout and a roulette wheel. It wasn't long before their joint made trouble. They were ordered off, but nivver a bit did they go. Then Mulloy, he gathered a dozen good men one night, and raided the place. Three av his men were shot some, but not fatally. One of the gamblers were planted next day. They smashed the faro layout and the roulette wheel. It were thought then it would end the trouble, but two days later Mendez had a bigger tint and a bitter layout. He pitched his tint off by his lonesome, and he had his whole bunch armed to the teeth to guard it. Our next move were to warn the bhoys to kape away. Whin it comes to gambling, these greasers are the biggest fools that iver breathed. You couldn't kape 'em away. The only thing that would do that would be a dozen gatling guns, and the sojers to work 'em. So Mendez went on reaping in the coin, and the case grew worse and worse.

"It might not av been so bad only the gamblers ladled out the mescal to the greasers and kipt them drunk most av the time. When a man gambles all night and drinks his fill av mescal, he's nivver a bit of good to handle a shovel in the morning. The whole gang were demoralized. On an average the min didn't do tin cints' worth of work a day. Something had to be done to shtop it. Thot's how the sicond trouble with Mendez came round. A hundred min, armed wid Winchesters, marched down to put him out av business. Thot time The Wolf were there. They didn't put the gamblers out av business, but next day the surgeon were busy wid a lot of our min. Afther that you couldn't get any one to tackle the gamblers, and they kipt right on wid their business.

"But the worst thing happened two wakes ago, whin the pay train were held up and robbed. Av course min couldn't be paid off, and the whole outfit just threw down their shovels and quit. I say the whole outfit, but perhaps there were fifty or a hundred min who kipt at work. You can't build a railroad wid a crew like that—at least not this sort of a railroad. Mulloy has been hustling for min iver since. His partner has been on the jump, and here we are wid this gang. It's right thot Mr. Scott is somewhere along the line. More than thot, I've been told he's sint for Frank Merriwell to come down."

"Who is Frank Merriwell?" inquired the blond stranger. "Is he connected with the road?"

"It were him that promoted the skame, sor. He owns a mine over in the mountains to the east, and the road will make his property worth tin times what it is now. I don't know much about him, sor, but I've

heard Barney Mulloy say that he's the mon to clean out The Wolves. I understand it was Mulloy who advised Mr. Scott to sind for him."

The blond stranger smiled the least bit.

"When Mr. Merriwell arrives," he said, "it's possible he'll find he has a heavy job on his hands. According to your own statement, Casey, I should say that there's no one man who can drive this bunch you call The Wolves."

"I dunno about thot," admitted Casey, shaking his head. "But, av Merriwell is half the mon Barney Mulloy thinks he is, Mad Mendez, Tom Stockton, and the whole crooked outfit will take to their heels. Wid them out av the way, this railroad will be pushed through in a hurry."

At this moment a tall, brown, raw-boned young man came pushing and elbowing his way along the aisle.

"Oh, here yeou aire, Casey!" he cried. "I sw'ar I've been hunting through every car for ye. Didn't know but yeou'd been dropped off somewhar. Gol-ding this dust! It gits inter a feller's throat and purty nigh chokes him ter death."

Frank Merriwell rose to his feet, and thrust forth an open hand.

"Ephraim!" he cried.

The tall young man staggered a bit, and his jaw drooped. An instant later he sprang forward, and seized Merry's hand.

"Waal, ding my potters!" he shouted. "It's Frank Merriwell, sure as I'm living!"

"The divvil ye say?" gasped Casey in astonishment.

The blond stranger regarded Merry with a sudden display of refreshed interest.

"Frank Merriwell?" he muttered, beneath his breath. "So this is the man!"

"What in the dickens are you doing here, Ephraim?" questioned Merry.

"Me? By gum, I'm hustling! Say, Barney's here at the head of the rails. He's a contractor, and I'm his side partner. Let me whisper in your ear, Frank. We're making a barrel of money. When we git through with this job, by ginger! we'll be so slappin' rich that we won't know what to do with our cash. I've just come down from the States, along with Casey, after hiring this gang of men."

Frank felt a glow of pride and satisfaction.

"Well, you're certainly getting on in the world, Ephraim!" he exclaimed. "I congratulate you. How is Mrs. Gallup?"

"Say, by hickory! she's the purtiest thing you ever see. But, hold on, Frank, you oughter see our off-shoot!"

"Wha-a-a-a-t?" cried Frank. "Your what, Ephraim?"

Gallup grinned and blushed.

"He's a bouncer," he declared. "Most five months old, and I swan he'll be putting on the gloves with me pretty soon, if he keeps it up at this clip. He's a corker! I ain't been jealous of you, Frank, only once since I

stole Teresa away from ye. Oh, she was plumb gone on you, no question 'bout that."

Merry laughed heartily.

"That was all your imagination, Ephraim," he said. "Teresa was gone on you all the time, but you were so everlasting slow that she had to make you jealous somehow. What do you mean by saying that you've been jealous only once since then? When was it?"

"When she insisted on naming the baby, Frank. What do you suppose we give that kid for a handle, hey? Well, sir, by gosh! we called him Frank Merrivell Gallup. How's that for a name?"

Ephraim beamed at Frank, again clasping his old friend's hand.

"I want to see that boy. Why didn't you let me know about this before? I might have brought him something."

"Been too gol-darned busy for the last six months to hunt up your address, Frank. You was skippin' round to beat the band. Never could tell where to locate ye. Thutteration! won't Teresa be tickled to see yeou!"

At this moment Gallup's eyes fell on Frank's seatmate. He stopped short, and stared at the man.

Merry noticed his friend's behavior, and he was certain Gallup recognized the blond stranger. In this he was not mistaken. Swiftly a look of anger banished the genial expression from Ephraim's countenance.

"Look here, Merry," he said harshly, "do you know who this critter is you've been settin' with?"

"I haven't the honor of knowing his name," admitted Frank.

"Waal, I'll tell you who he is, dad bim his measly hide! This critter right here is the one who's made most of the trouble for this railroad. I see him once, and I don't never forget nobody's face. He is Tom Stockton, the gambler, The Wolf!"

CHAPTER III.

THE ESCAPE OF THE WOLF.

The accused man smiled in the most unruffled manner.

Merry had stepped out into the aisle, so that Stockton was now between him and the window. The gambler seemed fairly trapped, yet this did not appear to disturb him.

"Well, what are you going to do about it?" he coolly asked, once more showing the tips of those pointed, wolfish teeth.

"So this is the man, is it?" said Merry, as he surveyed Stockton curiously. "It explains his interest in my affairs."

"Yes, gol-darn him!" palpitated Gallup. "He's the varmint. They ain't no proof of it, but I'll bet a Hubbard squash that he had something to do with the robbery of the pay train."

"Hold on," came icily from the gambler's lips. "Go slow, man. You may call me a gambler, a wolf, a

gun-fighter, anything you like, but don't call me a robber. I won't stand for that."

"What ye goin' ter do about it?" shrilly demanded Gallup.

Stockton had his hands in the side pockets of his coat.

"I'll have to close your mouth with a lead plug," he said.

Merry knew the man's hands grasped the butts of loaded weapons. He knew this mild-appearing desperado was ready to fight for his life against any man in that car, if necessary.

"Hold on, Gallup," said Frank quietly. "I wish to have a few words with the gentleman."

"Gentleman?" rasped Ephraim. "I hope yeou don't call a critter like him a gentleman."

Stockton was returning Merry's compliment by scrutinizing him closely. He smiled with something like pity in his expression.

"So you're the young fellow they sent for to come down here and straighten things out?" he murmured, "It's quite remarkable. I hardly think you understand the sort of job you're going up against."

"According to the statement of Mr. Casey," admitted Frank, "it's quite a stiff proposition."

"Mr. Casey has not overstated the case," bowed the gambler. "Boy, what do you think you can do? You won't last three days in this country."

"Possibly you're right," acknowledged Frank. "But, if you have an idea that I'm unfamiliar with this country, you're wholly mistaken. I've been here before."

Stockton shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, yes, I suppose you have. I understand you have a mine over in the mountains, but it's doubtful if you were ever called on to go up against real men down here. These Mexicans are a bad proposition. Then there are the Chiricahua Apaches. The Indians are not pleased with this railroad, which is going to cut their territory in two. They've been restless for some time, and it's a fact that they are arming and preparing to go on the war-path. Almost any time they may attack the graders, and you'll find war on your hands."

"We'll leave the Indians out of the question," said Merry. "In the first place we have to deal with white men, so called. You're entirely mistaken in thinking I've never had any trouble down this way. Did you ever hear of Black Jerez?"

"Oh, yes; he was a Mexican bandit. He's dead, I believe."

"The last I knew of him he was very much alive."

"And he is now, by Jim!" muttered Gallup, who had every reason to know, as Teresa was the daughter of Black Jerez.

"Well, what about him?" questioned Stockton smilingly.

"It's possible you know that Jerez and his followers claimed much of the territory to the westward as their particular preserve. They managed to get along well

enough with the Indians, and the Mexican Government was not strong enough or forceful enough to send troops up here and wipe out the bandits. When I attempted to move ore from my San Pablo Mine, Jerez had a way of dropping down on my pack-train and collecting toll. I couldn't stand that, and the result was war between us. I'm still running that mine, while you hear no more of Black Jerez."

Stockton laughed.

"I don't know how you got the best of the man," he admitted; "but don't fancy you'll be as lucky in this case. In the States you might get plenty of backing. Down here gambling is not regarded as such a crime. Every one gambles. I have a right to conduct my business. Mr. Merriwell, I want to inform you now that I have a permit which gives me the right. Legally you can't interfere with me. When you or any one else attempts to raid my place and destroy my outfit, you're lawbreakers and can be punished as such."

"The fact that the Mexican Government permits gambling does not make the business any less reprehensible. You know that, Stockton, if you have any sense of justice. You know you are robbing the poor laborers of their hard-earned money."

"Oh, they get a square deal with me."

"Do they?"

"I said so."

"I presume by that you mean you're not running any crooked games."

"Exactly. In two-thirds of the gambling-houses in this country the games are not on the level. I deal on the level, young man."

"Let's see if you do," said Frank. "One of your gambling devices is a roulette table. On that roulette table there are thirty-six numbers, besides the single o and the double o. That makes thirty-eight chances. You pay thirty-five for one. If you paid thirty-eight for one, the player would have an even show, in case the wheel was square. As it is, there is a heavy per cent. in favor of the house. The man who plays roulette in your house is sure to lose in the long run."

"Well, that's his business. If he knows it, and persists in playing, he has only himself to blame."

"How many of these ignorant Mexicans and half-bloods are there who understand this? You know there is not one in a hundred. You're robbing them right along, Stockton. On the faro table, if that game is fair, the 'splits' go in favor of the house. At that game you're robbing them. They're poor enough, anyhow. Day wages on this railroad for an ordinary Mexican laborer amounts to about twenty-one cents and grub. If these men gamble, they get practically nothing more than what they eat. No, Stockton, no government on earth can make gambling just. More than this, you sell mescal to those men. You ruin them as laborers. You're a menace to this railroad, and you'll have to pick up and get out of the country."

The Wolf laughed behind his blond mustache.

"It's really amusing to hear a youngster like you

talk in such a fashion," he said. "The idea of telling me that I'll have to do anything."

"By jinks! I guess you'll find out that you'll have to do it when Frank says so," chipped in Gallup.

"There is no question but you'll go," again asserted Merriwell. "You're imperiling my interests as well as the interests of this railroad. I've come down here to look after my own rights. I warn you now, Stockton, to pick up your outfit and go away without delay. Otherwise you'll have to suffer the consequences."

"And I warn you in return," said the gambler, "that you're making a bid for a nice, comfortable hole in the ground. I think your funeral will take place within a short time."

"Gol-ding his cheek!" palpitated Ephraim. "He stands right up to ye, don't he? Waal, I guess we'll show him, by thutteration! Here he is alone in the car with this crowd, and it's a dinged good time to jump on him."

"Better not try it," said The Wolf, shaking his head. "If you do, some one will get hurt."

Of course every one in the immediate vicinity had heard the talk between these men, and there was no small excitement. The laborers were crowding forward, peering over one another's shoulders and jabbering.

"Yeou're ketched!" shouted Gallup. "Yeou can't git away! If yeou shoot anybody, by ginger, we'll take yeou out and hang ye to a pole!"

Then he turned to the men.

"Come on," he cried, "grab this critter!"

Stockton was not anxious to begin shooting, for he knew such an action might arouse some of those men, even though it cowed others. For an instant his eyes wavered, and then he glanced toward the open window. He noted that, on account of a particularly rough road-bed, the train was running slowly.

Suddenly, without the least warning, The Wolf gathered himself and made a headlong dive through the window.

Frank sprang at him and barely touched his heels.

"Stop the train!" cried Merry.

Then he looked out to see what had happened. He was in time to behold Stockton, who had rolled to the foot of the grade, gathering himself up and coolly brushing some of the dirt from his clothes.

Gallup seized the bell-cord and gave it a jerk.

A moment later the train began to slow down.

Frank, Ephraim, Casey and many others rushed to the steps and sprang off before the train had stopped. They were in time to see Tom Stockton disappear into a strip of chaparral a short distance from the railroad.

Led by Frank, two-thirds of the men rushed toward the thicket. They found it practically trackless and almost like a tangled tropical jungle.

In vain they searched for the missing gambler. After a full hour spent in this manner, Merry reluctantly confessed that it looked as if Stockton had made good his escape.

CHAPTER IV.

FRANK MEETS OLD GRIPPER.

An hour later the train drew into the town of Mesquite, which consisted of the little railroad station and half-a-dozen *adobe* houses.

The place seemed literally swarming with men. They were mainly Mexicans and half-blood Indians. Swarthy, fierce-looking fellows were these Mexicans, strutting about in their serapes and smoking cigarettes. In the main the half-bloods looked peaceful and unwashed. Great groups of these men were gathered here and there, listening to the excited talkers, who jabbered among themselves in the patois of their country.

"Who are these men, Gallup?" questioned Frank.

"By gum, I cal'late they're the strikers. They're the men that quit because they didn't get their pay promptly on the nail. Them's the poor fellers The Wolf's been fleecing."

"What are they doing here?"

"I dunno. Let's try to find out."

When questioned, the station agent, who seemed in terror of his life, informed them that the angry strikers had cornered Watson Scott in Mesquite, and proposed to hold him until they obtained the money which they demanded.

"So Mr. Scott is here?" said Frank. "Can you tell me where I can find him?"

"See that 'dobe yonder?" said the station agent, pointing toward a low brown building that was literally surrounded by a swarm of the strikers.

"Yes."

"Well, he's in there with two or three others. They can't get out. I've been expecting the crowd to tear the 'dobe down any minute."

"Gallup," said Frank, turning to Ephraim, "tell the engineer to hold this train here. Keep your new men together at the station. Don't let them wander away, and warn them to keep out of trouble with these fellows."

Ephraim turned to Casey.

"Yeou're the man to look out for that, Mike," he said. "Will yeou see to it?"

"Shure an' I will, sor," answered Casey.

"Come on, Ephraim," said Frank.

"Whar be ye goin'?" asked the tall Vermonter, as he strode along at Merriwell's side.

"I'm going to see Watson Scott."

"How do yeou expect to git in thar?"

"I'll find a way. Leave that to me."

As they passed, the strikers regarded them sullenly, some muttering, and some venturing to profanely demand the money due them.

Not a word came from Frank. He cautioned Gallup against making any retort. In a short time they reached the edge of the mob packed round the 'dobe house.

Unhesitatingly Merriwell pushed into the mass of men, elbowing them aside. They gave way reluctantly,

scowling at him and Ephraim, while more than one hand disappeared beneath a serape, as if in search of a hidden weapon.

"Dad bim it!" whispered Gallup. "These fellers are liable to stick us in the ribs any minute. I kinder wish I was hum on the farm."

"Keep still," again warned Frank. "Follow closely."

He spoke to the men quietly and commandingly.

"Make way, men," he said. "Let us pass."

"Who are they?" demanded a Mexican, speaking in Spanish.

Another man recognized Gallup.

"Where is our money, gringo boss?" he cried. "Do you bring us our money?"

Merriwell did not pause for a moment. If a man hesitated about moving to let him pass, Frank gently but firmly moved that man aside. In this manner he advanced to the tightly closed door of the 'dobe house.

On this door he promptly rapped with great force, at the same time crying:

"Mr. Scott, open up! Let us in!"

"Who's there?" called a voice from within.

"Friends," answered Frank.

"It's Gallup!" cried Ephraim.

The door was opened slightly, whereupon Frank promptly pushed it wide, thrusting backward a man who had his shoulders against it. In a twinkling he was inside, with Ephraim behind him, and together they slammed the door and fastened it.

Not a moment too soon, for several of the aroused strikers lunged forward to follow them into the house.

A brawny, muscular young man, in shirt, trousers and boots, with his sleeves rolled above his elbows and a mat of tousled hair hanging over his forehead, stood staring at Frank Merriwell in the semigloom. Having entered from the open air, Merriwell's eyes were unaccustomed to the dimness of the place, and he could barely see the outlines of this man. A moment later, somewhat to his surprise, the fellow made a spring, and clasped him in his arms.

"Whoop! hooroo!" shouted this person. "It's Frankie bhoy, as thrue as Oi hope to ate the hin that scratches over me grave."

"Barney!" laughed Frank. "Barney Mulloy, you here?"

"Thot's phwat Oi am! May all the saints bless yez, Frankie! It's breaking me heart wid joy Oi am at the sight av yez."

There was both laughter and tears in the voice of Barney Mulloy.

Frank experienced the same keen sense of joy as he hugged the honest young Irishman in return.

"I didn't expect to find you here, Barney," he said. "I supposed you were at the head of construction, pushing the work."

"How the divvil can a mon push the worruk whin he has nothin' to push it wid?" demanded Mulloy.

"But I understood you had a small crew left."

"And so I did until the rest av these whilps av Satan

came down on me bhoys and sthopt them. Frankie, it's a rid-hot time we're afther havin'. Av ye enjoy tr'uble as ye did oncet, you'll git your fill av it here. Outside are fifteen hundrid dago mongrels jist a-lickin' their chops and waitin' to ate us up. It looked as if we were as good as dead min two hours ago, but still I hope to live till I die, if I don't git kilt."

"Where is Mr. Scott?"

"Roight this way. Say, Frankie, the old mon is the coolest birrud Oi iver capped me papers on. So help me, Saint Patrick, he's been slaping, wid thot mob howlin' outside."

There were two rooms in the 'dobe, and they now passed into the second one, where they found two men playing cards with a greasy pack, while a third man snored lustily on a rude bunk.

"There he is," said Mulloy, with a gesture toward the bunk. "Whin Oi told him the tarriers outside were likely to pull down this mud hut and butcher the four av us, says he to me, 'Mulloy, me mon, phwat's the use to worry over something thot may nivver happen? Oi'm tired. I haven't had a wink of slape for three days and three noights. This is me chanct. Jist kape the barking dogs out av you kin, whoile I git a wink.' And there he is, Frank, a-puttin' the winks in at the rate av a mile a minute."

Merriwell smiled as he surveyed the sleeping men.

"This is the man known in Wall Street as Old Gripper!" he muttered. "This is the man whose nerve and brain lifted him from poverty to millions."

Seeing him then, a stranger would not have fancied Watson Scott a millionaire. He was dirty. His face was covered with a scrubby growth of three days' beard, patched and bristling with gray. His nose had been burned and blistered by the Mexican sun. His clothes looked like the garments of a laborer.

Merriwell stepped to the bunk and shook the sleeper by the shoulder.

"Wake up, Mr. Scott," he said. "You must be rested by this time."

Old Gripper groaned, stretched his limbs, yawned, and mumbled:

"I'll give ten dollars for a piece of pumpkin pie. I'm hungry enough to eat a fried boot-leg. Is it time for breakfast?"

"Breakfast," laughed Frank. "This is not a call to breakfast. This is a call to business."

That word business seemed to give the sleeping man an electric shock. His booted feet dropped off the bunk, and he sat up.

"Who says business?" he demanded. "Who are you? What's that noise outside? Oh, yes, I remember. Those greasers are still howling round this ranch, are they?"

"I think you know me, Mr. Scott," said Frank.

The old man rose to his feet, and surveyed Merry.

"How are you Merriwell," he said calmly, as he took Frank's hand. "So you've arrived, have you? Wasn't looking for you. Kind of figured you'd get

along to-day or to-morrow. We're having a little trouble with the greasers. How'd you get in?"

"Walked in."

"But weren't they jammed round this house thicker than sardines in a box?"

"Yes; they're still there."

"That's right, by gum!" put in Gallup. "I'd never thought we could git through them, but Merry just walked right in and punched them right and left as keerless as yeou please. They didn't none of them try to stop him."

Old Gripper chuckled deep down in his thick throat.

"That's the kind of boy," he said. "We need a man like that. Things are going to the dogs on this line, Merriwell. We haven't had a man capable of meeting the situation and dominating it. Mulloy and Gallup had their hands full trying to keep part of the crew at work. It needed somebody to look out for the rest of the fellows, who struck when the pay train was robbed and we couldn't pay them promptly."

"Did you promise to pay them as soon as more money could be brought in?"

"Promise I should say I did. Thunder and Mars! I promised and talked until my throat was sore; but you can't reason with a lot of mixed-blood lunatics. They wanted their cash, and they wanted it instanter. They seemed to think we could make money. You know these men won't take anything but coin. That's why we have to bring the stuff down here and run the risk of being robbed. Once a week regularly they have to be paid in real money, and nothing else will satisfy them. Murder! but I'm hungry. I don't believe I've had anything to eat in twenty-four hours."

"That's bad," said Merriwell.

"Bad? It's criminal! It's bad enough for anybody to have to eat the grub you can get in this country, but when you can't get anything, you feel like taking to the war-trail. You know Gallup and Mulloy, I guess. These two are Jackson and Perkins. Gentlemen, this is Mr. Frank Merriwell."

He made a crude gesture toward the two men who had been playing cards. As Jackson and Perkins rose and bowed to Frank, one of them observed:

"We're right glad you've come, sir, and we're hoping you can do something to straighten this business out, though I don't see how."

There was an expression of doubt on his face as he regarded Merry. Evidently he had little confidence in the ability of this smooth-faced youth to settle such a serious matter, even though Watson Scott had expressed the greatest confidence in the young mine-owner.

"Let's sit down here and talk this matter over, Mr. Scott," said Frank. "I've learned a great deal concerning the condition of affairs from Gallup and a crew boss named Casey, who was on the train. I have also had the doubtful pleasure of meeting Tom Stockton."

"What?" cried Old Gripper. "You don't mean to say you've seen The Wolf?"

Frank nodded.

"He was my seatmate on the train."

Then they sat down, and Merriwell related the particulars of the affair on the train.

CHAPTER V.

THE HORSEMAN.

Across one end of the table lay two Winchester rifles. These weapons belonged to Jackson and Perkins, each of whom was also armed with a brace of long-barreled Colt revolvers. Barney Mulloy was likewise armed with a brace of heavy pistols, the butts protruding handily from the holsters.

Watson Scott carried no visible weapon.

From Mr. Scott's lips Merry learned the exact condition of affairs, and Old Gripper emphasized the declaration that the building of the railroad could not go on unless Tom Stockton should be disposed of in some manner.

"By actually stopping construction," said Merriwell, "I should think the man would be cutting off his own nose. As long as the work continues, and the men are paid, he might expect to secure the bulk of their wages in his usual crooked manner. I don't see why he should wish to make trouble enough to stop work on the road."

"I've figured it all out," nodded Watson Scott grimly. "He's been playing the leech as long as possible before putting into operation a plan he's had in view from the first. Certain other interests do not wish this road completed. Some one is behind Stockton. Some one has offered him a large sum to ruin our project. He'll make more money that way than he could carrying on his gambling business."

"I see," nodded Frank; "but it's remarkable that he has so much influence over the laborers."

"His influence comes mainly through his partner, Mendez. Mendez is a Mexican, and he knows how to work on the feelings of his countrymen."

"Then Mendez is even more dangerous than Stockton."

"In a way. Stockton is the brains of the combination. Still I don't believe he could carry the thing through without the aid of that crazy greaser. The pair of them make a perfect machine of deviltry. If I had two or three hundred good men from the States, properly armed, we'd soon put an end to the trouble."

Gallup had been listening. Now he spoke up.

"I have purty nigh three hundred laborers right here in Mezquite, by gum!" he exclaimed. "Just brung them in on the train."

"What sort of men are they?"

"Waal," drawled Ephraim, "they're mainly dagos and negroes, though there be about twenty good Irishmen in the lot."

"Hooroo!" cried Barney Mulloy. "Give me the Oirish!"

"The dagos are out of the question," said Scott,

"and the negroes can't be relied on. If your Irishmen were properly armed, they might amount to something. Have you weapons on the train?"

"I guess, by ginger! the most of them dagos is carrying knives," answered the Vermonter. "They always do that. You ken forbid it as much as yeou please, but they'll do it jest the same."

"That doesn't improve matters any. Your Irishmen are not armed?"

"Nope. Didn't think it a good plan to furnish them with weapons."

Old Gripper shook his head.

"You can't expect anything from them," he declared. "Have you any suggestions to make, Merriwell?"

"Not yet," confessed Frank. "I must have time to consider the matter."

"Well," said Scott, "if that yapping pack outside will let us alone, and I can get something to eat, I'm willing you should take all the time you want."

"Be gorry, sor," put in Mulloy, "I've told yez there's no great danger from the gr'asers as long as they know we're armed and detarnined to defind ourselves. They'll crawl around outside, but nivver a wan will be afther breaking in here, knowing it's a hundred chances to wan that he'll be filled full av lead before he kin stip insoide the door."

"If you had the money to pay those men off, it would be an easy matter to quiet them down, wouldn't it?" asked Merry.

"Certainly," nodded Scott. "I've tried to pay them with due-bills, but nothing except the cold coin will satisfy them. They look on paper with suspicion. I don't know as I blame them much, for lots of rascally concerns have cheated them with paper promises."

More than an hour passed while they talked over the situation. Finally Frank arose, saying:

"I think I'll go and get you something to eat, Mr. Scott."

"What's that?" cried Old Gripper eagerly. "Going to get me something to eat?"

"Sure."

"How are you going to do it?"

"Why, I'm just going to walk out by the front door, find something that will satisfy your hunger somewhere in town, and bring it back here."

"Do you think you can? You're liable to be torn to pieces by that snarling pack."

"I don't think so," said Merriwell. "Anyhow, I'll chance it."

"I'm going along wid ye, by hemlock!" declared Gallup. "Casey and the men must be gittin' purty gol-derned impatient by this time. I got to tell them what the raow is about."

"All right," said Merry, "only keep your weapons out of sight. Don't make a move to pull a weapon unless I give you the word. No matter how much the crowd howls, and snarls, and threatens, act as if you were perfectly at your ease, and not at all disturbed. I think I'll have a few words to say to them."

Mulloy was eager to accompany Frank and Ephraim, but Merriwell counseled against it.

"Better stay here with Perkins and Jackson to keep the crowd away from Mr. Scott," he said. "You can't afford to weaken the defense of this place."

Three minutes later the door opened, and Merriwell stepped out before the crowd, with Ephraim following closely. Barney promptly closed the door behind them.

There was a hush as Frank appeared. Beady eyes regarded him curiously, threateningly. He stood there, calmly surveying the wild-looking throng of strikers.

"Where is our money?" suddenly cried a man. And in a twinkling the pack began to yap and snarl like so many wolves. Fists were flourished in the air, and some of the more savage and determined ones tried to press forward.

Merriwell lifted a hand in a gesture that called for silence.

"Men," he said, in a clear voice, "by your folly you are simply defeating yourselves and delaying the payment of what is your just due. You'll receive every cent due you; but it is impossible to pay you now, the pay train having been held up and robbed. Already another pay car is on its way here."

"Lies! lies!" snarled one of the strikers. "The pay train was not robbed. No more money is coming."

Frank singled the striker out, and suddenly pointed a finger straight at him.

"There is the man who lies," he declared calmly. "He is your worst enemy, men. If you listen to him, you simply hurt yourselves. By making all this trouble, you're delaying the work of the very men who will hasten to bring you what is your just due."

"The company's bankrupt!" snarled the fellow accused by Merriwell. "You know it!"

"Another falsehood," said Frank. "This company is backed by some of the wealthiest financiers in the States. For certain reasons, another railroad doesn't wish this line completed. The agents of that road will spread the report that this company is bankrupt. If you will cease this rioting, and go back to work, inside of five days every man here will receive his pay."

Many of the strikers could not understand, and they set up a great jabbering, questioning one another concerning what the young man was saying. To his indignation, Merry heard some of these questioning ones informed that the speaker had threatened never to pay them a cent unless they instantly dispersed.

"Yeou're wasting your breath on them, Frank!" muttered Gallup. "Yeou can't reason with a lot of critters like these."

In spite of Gallup's words, Merry once more made a gesture for silence, and, when he could be heard, he quickly and concisely stated the actual condition of affairs. To the surprise of not a few in the crowd, a part of this speech was made in Spanish, so that those who had not previously understood him were able to comprehend what he was saying. He saw a change come over the throng. They began to look at each

other and mutter that the gringo might be telling the truth.

Merry warned them to pay no attention to the ones who were inciting them to riot. Having thus sown seeds, which he hoped would spring up and bear good fruit, he again pushed through the crowd, with Ephraim following, and strode away toward the little railroad station.

"You've got 'em guessin', Frank," chuckled the Vermonter. "They dunno jest what ter think about it naow. Still, I'm afeared it won't do much good. Stockton's got some of his agents in that bunch, and they'll keep at the critters."

"Well, at least it gave us a chance to pass through that trouble," said Merry. "Now, where are we going to find grub for Watson Scott?"

"I guess, by gum! we can find it on the train. We've got a car-load of canned stuff."

"Well, that's all right. It's my opinion that canned food will taste like a Sherry dinner to Old Gripper."

They found the laborers gathered about the station platform, many of the negroes sprawling on the ground, where they cooked comfortably in the heat of the sun, with their hats pulled over their eyes. Some of the Italians were playing cards. On the platform two Irishmen were dancing a jig, while a third whistled a lively tune, and half-a-dozen kept time with clapping hands.

Casey hurried to meet them.

"Where the divvil have you been so long?" he asked. "It's nervous I were gittin' over yez."

Gallup made a curt explanation, while Merry turned away and sought the engineer, whom he found oiling his locomotive.

"What's your name?" asked Merry.

"Higgins, sir."

"Well, Higgins, I presume you know Watson Scott?"

"I've seen him, sir. He's the main guy behind this road, isn't he?"

"Yes. Do you see that gang of strikers round the 'dobe yonder?"

"Yes, sir."

"Scott's in there. They've got him penned up. I'm in hopes to get him out later on, and get him onto this train. Keep up steam, and be ready to pull out in a hurry."

"All right, sir," answered Higgins.

Without another word, Merry turned back and looked for Gallup.

"Get a move on, Ephraim," he said. "Bring out some of that canned stuff. Tell Casey to keep the men close to the cars and ready to jump aboard in a twinkling. Also tell him to have his Irishmen and reliable men armed with picks, shovels or anything in the way of a weapon that will enable them to hold the strikers off if they attempt to board the train."

When everything was arranged to his satisfaction, Frank again set out for the besieged 'dobe, accom-

panied by Gallup, both being well loaded down with canned stuff.

They had not proceeded half the distance from the station to the 'dobe house before there was a wild chorus of shouts, a clatter of hoofs, and over a dozen horsemen came galloping into Mezquite. Their horses were a-reek and covered with dust. The most of them were Mexicans, armed to the teeth, and they looked like brigands.

The man who led them was not over twenty-five, with a buckskin jacket, red sash, open, slashed buckskin breeches, with silver buttons of bulls' heads down the seams, wide sombrero, and ivory-handled revolvers protruding from his pockets. He had a small black mustache and piercing, dancing coal-black eyes. At his side rode another man, whom Frank recognized, not without a start of dismay, for it was Stockton, the gambler.

This man saw Frank and Ephraim, and came tearing at them as if determined to run them down. In a moment the entire band drew up, surrounding the two young men and completely hemming them in.

"Caught!" grated Merry, dropping the cans he was carrying.

Before he could pull a weapon, one of the horsemen leaned from the saddle, grasping the barrel of a pistol in his hand, and brought the butt down with crashing force on Merry's head.

CHAPTER VI.

A LIFE IN THE BALANCE.

It's not agreeable to ride thirty miles or more with one's hands bound behind his back. Merriwell found it a relief to dismount at last beneath the gleaming stars when finally the band halted in the courtyard of an old *hacienda*. There were no gleaming lights and no voices to welcome. The place seemed deserted.

Gallup likewise was stiff and sore. He groaned and growled as he was dragged from the saddle by two of their captors.

"By gum!" he said. "This ain't jest the kind of business that suits my taste. I kinder wish I was ter hum on the farm."

The horses' hoofs clattered on the flagstones of the courtyard as they were led away.

"Have our birds brought in," said the voice of Tom Stockton.

"*Si, señor,*" answered Mad Mendez, the leader of the desert riders.

Dark doors yawned for them. With their captors pushing them on, they stumbled up black, unlighted stairways. Finally they were thrust into a large square room, where a dozen candles gleamed. Behind them the door closed, and they were alone.

"Waal, here we be," said Ephraim dolefully, as he looked around.

"Where are we? That's the question," came from Frank. "What sort of a place is this?"

"I kinder guess it must be one of them old ranches that once belonged to the robber *hidalgos* of this section. You know there was two or three of them fellers that kinder retired up inter this region and settled here. They called themselves patriots, for they fit under some of the rebels who tried to overthrow the Mexican Government. Teresa's dad was one of 'em. He's livin' on his ranch now, and it can't be more than seventy-five mile from here. Teresa is thar with him. Say, Frank, if she knowed we was in this scrape, there'd be something doing, and don't you forget it. If the old don knowed it, he'd mighty soon raise a raow."

"Unfortunately, they don't know it. We're in a bad scrape, Ephraim, old man, but we'll have to get out of it somehow. Why didn't those ruffians free our hands? My wrists are nearly chafed to the bone. Back around here, Ephraim, until I can get my fingers at your knots. I think we can manage to get our hands free in a few minutes."

Back to back they stood, and Merry worked hard at the knotted cords which held Gallup's wrists. In a short time he succeeded in loosening them, and finally the Vermonter's hands were free. This being done, Ephraim turned his attention to Frank's bonds, and soon cleared them from his wrists.

"There," said Merry, as he stretched his arms, with a sigh, "that's better."

A low laugh greeted his words, and, whirling quickly, they saw Stockton standing in the open doorway.

"Just coming in to cut you loose, gentlemen," said the gambler. "Make yourself at home. Try to be as comfortable as you can, while you live."

"While we live?" whispered Gallup. "Dern my punkins! I don't like the way he says that."

Stockton staggered into the room, and he was followed by Mendez, who surveyed the captives keenly with his dancing eyes.

"You're altogether too kind, Mr. Stockton," said Merry. "It seems too bad to put you to so much trouble."

"Don't mention it, young man," smiled The Wolf. "The pleasure is all mine."

"By ginger! that's right," put in Gallup. "You're suttinly havin' most of the fun jest naow."

"But there's another time coming," reminded Merriwell.

"I fear there's no other time coming for you," said

the gambler. "You will find paper and stationery on the table yonder. You might wish to make a will, or something of that sort."

"Very thoughtful of you," bowed Merry. "Evidently you fancy I'll be seized with a sudden fatal illness."

"Exactly," bowed Stockton, in return. "I am quite sure of it, and, unfortunately, there is no competent physician present."

"Derned if he don't mean ter butcher us!" whispered Ephraim. "Waal, by hemlock, I suttinly do wisht I was hum on the farm now!"

"Is this your usual method of dealing with your enemies, Stockton?" asked Frank. "Are you a cut-throat, as well as a gambler? During my life I've met a few men of your profession, and among them all I've found that the very worst usually boasted that he gave his victims a show. I've known Bob Silver, Santa Fé Bill, and Kid Curry. They were all gun-fighters and man-killers, but every one of them insisted that he'd never kill an enemy in cold blood."

"Apparently you've met some interesting characters in your day," retorted Stockton. "Curry was my side partner in Texas before they cleaned up El Paso and drove us across the river. I was with him the night he was shot. He was a gun-fighter, but, as you say, he gave every man a show."

"I had a little talk with you on the train to-day," came from Merriwell. "You boasted that you also gave every man a square deal. Evidently you were not telling the truth."

In spite of his nerve, the gambler flushed a bit.

"So you demand a show, do you?" he said grimly. "Well, you shall have it. I give every man a show at my own game. Mendez, will you please have cards brought."

The Mexican smiled, and stepped quickly to the door.

"*Hola, Conchita,*" he called into the darkness outside. "Bring cards, Conchita."

A few moments later there was a rustle outside, and in the doorway appeared a vision that gave both the young Americans a start. It was a girl not over eighteen years of age. She had purple-black hair, long, drooping lashes, ivory-white skin, and a certain languorous indolence of manner. Her figure was exquisite. Her garments were those of a Mexican belle, rich in texture, gay in colors, with a scarlet sash and short skirt, which exposed dainty ankles, encased in white silk stockings. She wore kid slippers, with high red heels, on her small feet.

The moment Gallup saw her he uttered a half-smothered exclamation and gave a start of surprise.

"Gee whilkins!" he whispered hoarsely.

The girl had brought a pack of cards, which she handed to Mendez, who immediately placed them on the table.

"Now, my friend," said Stockton, addressing Merriwell, "you shall have your chance. We'll sit down here and play cards—for your life."

The eyes of Mendez were dancing on Merriwell, and his back was toward the girl. Thus he failed to see a signal which passed between Conchita and Gallup. Swift as a flash, she lifted one finger and pressed it to her lips. Ephraim understood, and nodded, immediately turning away, lest by some movement or expression he should betray himself.

Frank stepped deliberately to the table and picked up the cards. He had not looked at the face of them, but spread them out in his hands and glanced at their backs. An instant later, with a scornful laugh, he flung them down.

"Is this your boasted square deal, Stockton?" he cried fiercely. "Those are gamblers' cards. They are marked, and you know it."

The Wolf did not deny the accusation. Instead of that, he laughed softly, and observed:

"You're really shrewder than I fancied, young man. I confess that the cards are markers; but Conchita was not told to bring this pack. Had you agreed to play with them, I should not have permitted it."

"You will excuse me," said Merry, "if I express my doubts."

"Oh, very well," retorted Stockton, shrugging his shoulders. "You're at liberty to doubt as much as you please. We'll have another pack. Conchita, will you favor us by bringing cards that are not markers. Take these away, please."

He gathered them up and handed them to the girl, who bowed, murmured something, and swiftly left the room.

In a brief space of time she was back again. Instead of handing the cards to Mendez, she glided past him, and placed them in Frank's hands.

"I theenk you will find zeze cards honest, señor," she said.

Merriwell smiled on her in his finest manner, at the same time bowing low, with a hand on his heart.

"*A los pies de usted, señorita,*" he murmured. In which manner he expressed his gratitude by saying that he placed himself at her feet.

She was surprised to hear him address her thus in her own language, and, with a flashing smile, she retorted:

"Bese usted les manos, señor."—My hands for your kisses, sir.

In a moment Frank had her fingers clasped in his, and pressed his lips to her hands. Something like a strange thrill of hope shot over him as he felt those small, soft fingers give him a quick, warm pressure. It was a signal of sympathy—a signal full of hopeful promise.

He did not examine the cards thus brought him, but dropped them on the table. As he turned from Conchita, he spoke to Stockton:

"We will play with these. What shall the game be?"

"I will give you the privilege of naming it," said Stockton, with an air of confident generosity. "Perhaps you would be satisfied to settle the matter with a poker hand? That is our great American game for high stakes, and surely the stakes in this game are high enough to satisfy you. What do you say?"

"I'm willing," said Frank.

"Then it is settled. We'll cut the cards for the deal, high card to give the choice. The dealer will throw out two hands. We'll discard and draw. Then we'll show down. If I hold the high hand, your fate is settled, and you'll be given time to make your will, write letters, if you wish, or say a prayer. Mendez will attend to your disposal. If you hold the high hand, I shall find it necessary to keep you in my care until you can give me no further trouble, after which you will be set at liberty somewhere in the desert, and be permitted to escape with your life, if you can."

Conchita was listening intently. Her eyes were fastened on the face of the young American, as if searching there for some expression of fear. If this was true, she saw nothing of the sort, for Merriwell's features were as calm as those of one who sits down to play whist in the security of his own home.

Although Frank was not nervous, such could not be said of Ephraim Gallup, who quivered in every limb. The Vermonter's face was pale and drawn, and he could not refrain from casting a quick, beseeching glance at Conchita. In return, she frowned on him, and shook her head.

Stockton shuffled the cards, and passed them to Merry for him to do the same. In a moment they were placed once more on the center of the table.

"You first, sir," bowed the gambler.

Frank cut and held up a knave—the knave of spades, dark and ominous.

The gambler deliberately extended his hand, and lifted a part of the pack, displaying to view the queen of diamonds.

"Ah!" he said, with a smile, "the ladies always favor me. It is my choice, and I will deal the cards."

Then they sat down for that deal of death.

CHAPTER VII.

THE STRUGGLE OF A SOUL.

A terrible struggle was taking place within Ephraim Gallup's soul. His face was ashen, and in his eyes a deep dread flickered and gleamed. His hands were clenched, while beads of perspiration began to stand out on his forehead.

"They mean to kill Frank, sure as fate!" he thought. "There ain't no chance for him. This monkey-business about the keerds won't do him no good. Stockton will trick him. He's the same as done for."

It was a fearful thing to see one's dearest friend thus calmly face his fate at the hands of cutthroats. Gallup knew what sort of men those Mexican brigands were. They valued a human life scarcely more dearly than the whiff of a cigarette. To them nothing was sacred and dear save their own worthless lives. As long as they could do so with an assurance of safety and protection, they pillaged and killed without remorse. Fear of punishment was the only thing that restrained them from any crime.

At one time a great part of that State of Sonora had been terrorized by these bandits, who held ruthless sway in defiance of law and the Mexican Government. In vain troops were sent out to punish them or destroy them. They fled to the fastnesses of the mountains, and, when the troops were gone, they came forth again to their raiding and plundering.

Not until President Diaz took the reins of government in his hands were these marauders checked. Diaz realized that the military power of his country was not sufficient to suppress them. Therefore he issued proclamations granting pardon to all outlaws who should come in and lay down their arms. Those who first accepted these terms were not only pardoned, but were practically pensioned for life, as the president appointed them to permanent paying positions under the government. Their comrades held aloof for a time, and looked on in doubt and uncertainty, remembering the usual readiness of the government to forget prom-

ises and deal out punishment when once it had placed hands on any of their kind.

Finally, however, the bandits began to believe that the government was sincere. They noted that their comrades who had surrendered were not only pardoned, but had been given sinecures for life, by which they might live in comfort, with no fear of poverty in old age.

Gradually others followed the example of the first few who surrendered. Still none were punished, and the system of reward continued. After a time the brigands began to make a grand rush to surrender. They came in so fast that it was no longer possible to appoint them to the positions like those given the first ones who surrendered. The president had a problem on his hands. He could not pension all those outlaws off in idleness, as it would make a heavy burden for the country. He solved the problem by organizing the reformed rascals into a sort of military police, every man being well paid and assured of his pay as long as he should serve the country. This military force Diaz soon sent out against the brigands who still remained obdurate.

The reformed scoundrels were well suited to the task of hunting down their former comrades in crime. They knew all the haunts of the marauders, and they went at the task with a dash and vigor that was both satisfying and pleasing to the government. Having lived wild lives of peril, they were not such men as could readily settle down to a quiet, monotonous existence, and, therefore, the service they were called upon to perform exactly suited their tastes and inclinations.

Many furious battles took place between the new guard of the country and their old outlaw comrades. In these battles great numbers were killed on both sides. On more than one occasion the military suffered disastrous defeat. This, however, produced no feeling of panic among the officials in the City of Mexico. When a hundred of the robber military were slain, the officials smiled secretly, for that meant a hundred less pensioners under the government. At the same time, the bandits were being thinned out.

This thing continued until brigandage, as it once flourished in Mexico, was practically a thing of the past. Nevertheless, a few of the most daring and crafty outlaws, who had refused to surrender and become soldiers, succeeded in escaping destruction, and continued their unlawful careers. Of the leaders of these, Mad Mendez was one. About him he gathered, one by one, a following of the most ruthless and de-

termined cutthroats. When hard pressed by the soldiers, he fled with his band into the wildest reaches of the mountains, where time after time he baffled pursuit. All Sonora knew his reputation and feared him. While the military force was present and active, he remained in hiding. When it was withdrawn, he came forth and pillaged again.

Strangely enough, when the new railroad began pushing eastward across Sonora, the soldiers departed from that region. Mad Mendez and his band came forth and boldly mingled with the people, who held them in dread. But now there was another leader, who seemed even more powerful than Mendez, and from whom Mendez took orders. It was the American, Tom Stockton, who was known far and wide as The Wolf.

Instead of raiding, after their usual fashion, Mendez and his men seemed to act as a sort of body-guard for Stockton. That they were well paid, there could be no doubt. Otherwise, they would not be contented to lead such quiet lives.

Those who meditated wisely on the situation divined a motive in the apparent peacefulness of the bandits. As long as they refrained from raiding and plundering, no complaint could be made to the government, and therefore the authorities could claim there was no real necessity of sending troops into Sonora.

At last, however, they had struck. A pay train had been held up and robbed.

This seemed to indicate that the crisis had arrived, and the time for the great struggle that should decide the fate of the Central Sonora was at hand.

Knowing the bloodthirsty inclinations of these men into whose hands they had fallen, it is not strange that Gallup should be overcome with apprehension for the life of his old-time comrade.

Ephraim thought of Frank's many brave and noble acts. He recalled the old days at Fardale, when they were school-chums together. He recalled their adventures in many lands since that time, and he remembered that more than once he had been defended or rescued from the most deadly peril by this same Merriwell, who now so calmly faced Tom Stockton, The Wolf. Never for an instant had Merriwell hesitated about risking his own life in defense of a friend.

No wonder Ephraim, like many others, had come to regard Frank Merriwell with affection of indescribable depth. To him, Merry was the finest example of manhood in the world.

"They mean to kill him right away," thought the Vermonter. "If they'd give him a little time, perhaps

he'd find a way to escape—perhaps Conchita might save him. She would do her best, if I could appeal to her. His life is wuth a gol-derned sight more than mine. He's baound to accomplish great things in the world, while I guess I'll never amaount to a great deal, nohow. Why didn't they pick me aout? I oughter be the one. It's my place to step right for'ard and say so."

Then he thought of Teresa and little Frank, and his heart failed him.

"I can't do it, by gum!" he hoarsely whispered to himself. "It ain't no use. I'm a gol-dinged coward!"

Another thought followed. Frank was married, and somewhere Inza, his wife, was waiting and yearning for him to return to her. Gallup remembered Inza. Her face seemed to rise before him, and her eyes were fastened beseechingly and reproachfully upon him. He fancied her lips moved, and she murmured: "Is this your loyalty to your old comrade?"

Stockton's long, slim fingers were gathering up the cards. He was smiling with confidence as he surveyed the calm, handsome young man seated at the opposite side of the table. To The Wolf, this was entertainment and diversion of a most amusing kind. He had nothing in the balance, yet he was playing with a human life. Apparently he was satisfied that the result would mean death to Merriwell.

With the deftness of one long familiar in handling cards, Stockton divided the pack into two equal portions, placed the corners together and rippled them, giving them a little nudge and a push as he thrust them together. It was the movement of a practised farodealer.

"Frank has no chance against his skill," thought Gallup again. "He knows where every card in the pack lays. If he shuffles a dozen times, and Merry cuts 'em, still he'll deal hisself the keerds he wants."

Cold as ice, he watched the graceful, mechanical movements of the gambler. The cards were thoroughly shuffled, and Stockton placed them before Merry, who put out his hand to cut.

At this juncture Gallup suddenly moved. With a forward spring, he cried:

"Hold on, there, by gum! Jest you wait a minute!"

CHAPTER VIII.

LOYAL HEARTS.

Merriwell looked up in surprise, his hand poised.

With an oath, Stockton turned his head and stared at the Vermonter.

"What's the matter with you?" he demanded. "This is not your game. Why do you chip in?"

"I'm interested in this game, gol-dern my punkins if I ain't!" spluttered Gallup. "As long as yeou're baound to massacree one of us, why don't yeou take me?"

Stockton's look of surprise was followed by a derisive, scornful smile.

"You?" he said sneeringly.

"Yes, me, by thutteration!" palpitated Gallup. "I'm the one to play that game. You git right up, Frank, and let me set daown thar. Naow, don't you say no, for I'm goin' to do it, by the everlastin' jingoes!"

He reached Merry's side, and literally tried to pull him out of the chair.

"Stand back, you crazy idiot!" cried The Wolf, with a snarl. "What's the matter with you? Are you so anxious for death? If you are, you can have it—now!"

Like a flash of lightning, he produced a pistol and leveled it straight at Gallup's heart.

Up rose Merriwell, planting himself squarely in front of Ephraim.

"Put down that gun, Stockton," he said quietly. "I hardly expected a man like you to pull a shooting-iron under such conditions. We're disarmed and helpless in your hands. Your cutthroats are outside, where you can call them any moment."

The gambler lowered his hand until it rested on the table, still grasping the butt of that deadly weapon.

"You're right about that, Merriwell," he admitted; "but I'm not a man who allows any one to interfere with my business. That fool attempted to chip in, and he came within a hair's breadth of getting a bullet in his teeth. Tell him to stand back and keep quiet."

Merry turned to Ephraim, grasping one of his hands with a firm pressure of affection. Looking into Gallup's face, he saw there tokens of the intense anguish the faithful fellow had endured.

"It's no use, Ephraim, old chum," he said quietly. "You can't do anything for me. I must play the game to the finish, let that be what it may."

"But it ain't fair!" groaned Gallup. "It's a gol-darned, murderous shame! They oughter picked me aout, anyhow."

"My boy, you have much to live for. Think of Teresa and the baby."

"Think?" muttered Ephraim huskily. "I have thought. I've got them, that's true; but you've got Inza. It'll kill her, Frank! Besides that, it'll be a loss to the whole gol-dinged world. And I don't

guess there'll be nobody besides Teresa and two or three others that'll miss me much."

In spite of Merry's nerve, a mist came to his eyes. Such noble self-sacrifice, such untold affection, moved him to the very core.

"It's useless, Gallup, old comrade," he said, holding his voice steady with an effort. "You would be an easy victim for this card-sharp. I shall not be so easy. I'm going to play him, Ephraim, and I'm going to beat him."

"Yeou can't dew it!"

"You shall see. Something tells me I can. It may give me a short respite. Of course they can butcher us both any time they choose, but, if I win against Stockton, I fancy he'll delay matters somewhat. He boasts of his squareness."

"And yeou know he's crooked all the way through."

"If I'm killed," whispered Merry, "you may escape somehow. Tell Inza——"

Gallup's chin quivered, but he suddenly brought his teeth together and stiffened up with an effort to steel his nerves.

"Dad-bing these cutthroats!" he grated. "If I dew live, I'll make 'em suffer for it!"

Breathlessly Conchita had watched every movement and listened to every word. When Frank started up before Stockton's pistol, the girl's hand disappeared into her bosom, and her eyes seemed to blaze. She crouched slightly, as if on the point of leaping at the gambler's back.

Although Stockton did not know it, he was close to death at that moment, for Conchita's hand grasped the hilt of a stiletto, and her passionate impulse would have led her to bury it into the man's back, had he pulled the trigger. The girl saw Merriwell gently push Gallup away and again sit down at the table.

"*Madre de Dios!*" she breathed. "How brafie he ees! How brafie he ees!"

"Put up the pistol, Stockton," said Frank. "You don't need it. We'll begin the game."

The gambler's weapon disappeared from view, and he smiled once more.

"I compliment you on your nerve, Merriwell," he said. "As for the other fellow, I think he's too big a fool to know what he was doing."

Mendez stood with folded arms, a most picturesque figure, as he coolly watched all these movements. Seemingly, he was totally indifferent to what happened, yet he knew he was the one chosen to act as executioner, should the life of Merriwell be forfeited by that game.

The cards lay as Stockton had placed them.

Reaching out again, Frank quietly cut them, and once more displayed to view the knave of spades.

"It's an omen, Mr. Merriwell," said Stockton. "Twice that dark gentleman has faced you, and spades shall dig your grave. But you've forgotten; you're not cutting for deal now. You should not have exposed the card. I'll have to shuffle again."

Once more he handled the cards in that slippery, skilful manner, and placed them before Frank, who made the cut, after which the gambler joined the two portions of the pack and deliberately began to deal.

In the silence of that room, the slipping sound of the cards and the slight noise they made as they fell one on another in two lots was distinctly heard.

Merriwell did not touch his cards until five lay before him. Then he picked them up. Stockton did the same, but, instead of looking at his hand, he glanced over it with eyes that keenly searched the face of the youth at the opposite side of the table.

It was the gambler's trick of seeking to read the strength of an opponent's hand by the expression of his countenance.

But Frank Merriwell's countenance was as immovable and unreadable as that of the Sphinx. It betrayed neither elation nor disappointment.

When he surveyed his own cards, Stockton found three queens in his hand. In this he was not disappointed, for he had expected they would be there.

At first glance, Merriwell beheld two aces, one of hearts and one of spades.

On further examination of the hand, he found that it contained a four-straight flush, broken in the middle. He had an ace, deuce, four and five spot of hearts.

He took his time to meditate on the hand, sitting there with that same immovable, unreadable countenance. A pair of aces seemed good. If he drew to them, there was a possibility that he might better them. Perhaps he might secure another ace.

What did Stockton hold?

Frank asked himself the question, and, for the first time, shifted his glance the least bit, so that his eyes surveyed the countenance of the gambler.

The Wolf was still smiling. It was a smile of confidence, for he believed that the result was at his command.

"If by any chance," thought Frank, "these cards have been marked since coming from the manufacturer, it is probable that the highest ones are indicated. It's hardly probable that they have been marked below the ten spots."

He knew it was the habit of gamblers to mark the high cards of a pack when playing with them. They seldom marked the low cards. Therefore, if this pack was marked, Stockton probably knew that Merry held a pair of aces. But it was doubtful if he knew more about the remaining three cards than that they were small ones.

Again Frank surveyed his hand, and for the moment he could see nothing but the ace of spades, which seemed to stand before him with such prominence that it overshadowed the others.

"Stockton said that spades would dig my grave," he thought. "If I keep that ace, it will do it."

"How many cards will you take, sir?" politely inquired the gambler.

Deliberately Frank drew the ace of spades from amid the others and placed it on the table.

"You may give me one," he said.

His eyes were again fastened on Stockton's countenance, and he fancied that the gambler betrayed the least touch of surprise.

"That man knew I held those aces," Merriwell decided. "He's bothered now, for he doesn't know what I'm trying to do. It's likely he reckons I'm trying to fill a small straight or an ordinary flush. If I get the three spot of hearts, my hand wins."

"Only one card?" said Stockton, lifting his eyebrows a bit. "Well, I'm going to draw to the strength of my hand. I'll take two."

Merriwell placed his four cards face downward on the table.

Stockton tossed another on top of them, and then took two for himself. Picking up his own hand, the gambler found that he had another queen, which made him four.

He laughed a little as he surveyed the quiet youth, who still permitted those cards to lay there, without even glancing at them.

"I'm sorry for you, Merriwell," he said. "I see you don't dare look at your hand. I don't blame you."

"Oh, you're mistaken," retorted Frank. "I'm not at all afraid to look at it."

Behind Merry's chair, Gallup was shaking like one with the ague.

Conchita leaned forward, her lips parted, scarcely seeming to breathe.

Mendez still stood, calm and immovable, with folded arms.

"Perhaps it's not worth while for you to show your cards at all," said the triumphant gambler. "I have you beaten."

"If so, you must have a good hand," said Merry.

"I have," nodded The Wolf. "The ladies always favor me, as I previously remarked. I have four of them here."

He spread them out, face upward, on the table.

Frank leaned forward a bit and looked at the hand.

"That's pretty good," he confessed.

"Pretty good," echoed The Wolf; "I should say it was! Of course it's not worth while for you to show your hand, but still, I'd like to know what you drew to and what you hold."

"I drew to hearts," said Merriwell. "You boast that you've ever been favored by the ladies. I, in turn, have always had the favor of loyal hearts. All through my life hearts have been true to me. And," he added, lifting his voice a little, "they are true to me now, for I hold a straight flush of hearts."

One by one he picked up and exposed the four cards he had held before the draw. He showed the ace, deuce, four and five spot, and then paused.

"Ha! ha!" laughed Stockton. "You were foolish to draw to such a hand. You have not one chance in five thousand of filling it with the three spot of hearts."

"But I took that chance," said Merry; "and here is the three spot."

He turned the card over.

It was the three spot of hearts!

CHAPTER IX.

CONCHITA'S PROMISE.

In spite of herself, Conchita uttered a low, short cry.

Fortunately, her exclamation was unheard by Stockton or Mendez, for at the same moment the gambler gave vent to an oath.

Ephraim Gallup staggered to a chair, on which he fell, as limp and nerveless as a wet rag.

"Well, of all luck!" cried The Wolf, in exasperation. "How did you know that card was the one you wanted?"

"My guardian genius whispered in my ear that I would draw it," answered Frank. "I never doubted after that."

Mendez had been robbed of the immediate pleasure of cutting a throat, and he betrayed disappointment.

As soon as he realized that Merriwell had actually won, Stockton snapped his fingers and rose from the table, at the same time catching up the cards and giving them a flirt that scattered them over the floor.

"That's the first time they ever turned against me," he said.

"But it's not likely to be the last time luck will run against you," retorted Merry. "I think the tide has turned, Stockton. From this time on, you may find yourself up against it."

The Wolf shrugged his shoulders and showed his pointed teeth in a grim smile.

"I'll not worry about that," he said. "As far as you're concerned, I'll keep my word, and spare you for the present. You'll be held a prisoner here while I continue operations. To tell you the truth, since our little game, I'd really hate to do you any bodily harm. I admire your nerve, young man."

"No thanks," flung back Merry. "Your admiration does not flatter me in the least. As for you, Stockton, your career is pretty sure to come to a violent end. There is only one method by which you can avert such a calamity to yourself. If you fancy you can get the best of the powers behind the Central Sonora by the methods you are pursuing, you're doomed to disappointment."

"We'll not discuss that," the gambler sharply cut in. "I know my business, and a stripling like you can't give me points and advice. As for you and your friend, you'll be held captives here as long as it's safe to keep you at this old ranch. When it becomes dangerous, you'll either be moved—or snuffed out. While you're prisoners, I'll see that you're made fairly comfortable. Mendez, Conchita, remove these candles. Leave two; that will be enough for them."

The candles were gathered up, and Stockton paused at the door to again survey Merriwell from his head to his feet.

"With a side partner of your nerve," he said, "I could govern the whole of northern Mexico."

The door closed behind him, and they heard a heavy bolt pushed into its socket.

Gallup seized Frank's hand and shook it; following which, he embraced Merry and gave him a bearlike hug.

"Waal, dern my poteters!" he cried. "I never spected to see yeou git out of that. By ginger, it was wonderful!"

"It was wonderful," admitted Merry soberly. "I don't know why I had such confidence that I would draw that trey of hearts. Something seemed to tell me I could not fail."

"Waal, we're still alive and kickin'," laughed the Vermonter.

"We're kicking, but the boundaries of our kicks will

be limited to this room, unless something new develops."

"Thar's a chance for us now, Frank," whispered Ephraim. "Did yeou notice anything abaout that gal?"

"Conchita?"

"Yes."

"Gallup, she knows you."

"I should say she did, by hemlock! Why, Frank, she was daown at old Don Juan's ranch when the babby was born. Gol-ding it all! she's Teresa's cousin."

"Her cousin?" exclaimed Merry, in astonishment.

"Sure as potetter-bugs is a pest."

"Her cousin? Is that possible?"

"Waal, it does seem dinged queer. But yeou see, the old don was one of these bandits before he reformed and settled daown. I never see Conchita till she came to visit us. Didn't know nothin' abaout her. Teresa never told me much, though one day she did kinder hint that Conchita's brother was a lawless rascal. He must be one of these gol-dinged wolves."

"I think that's the explanation of it, Gallup," nodded Frank. "There seems no other good reason for the presence of such a girl in this place. Conchita certainly had good sense when she kept still and concealed the fact that she knew you."

"That's right, by jingoes! I come pretty nigh givin' it away, but she jest clapped a finger onto her purty mouth, and frowned at me and shook her head."

"Ephraim, we have a friend at court."

"Hey? What do you mean?"

"Conchita may assist us somehow."

"That's right, by juniper! I'm thinking she'll try to dew it."

"We'll have to depend on her, for doubtless we'll be closely guarded, and any attempt on our part to escape from this room will be the signal for our slaughter."

"Guess that's so. Anyhaow, I hope they don't starve us to death. I'm gittin' purty thunderin' hungry myself."

"I could eat something, too," admitted Merry.

An hour had not passed when they heard the bolt of the door move, and the door itself swung open. Conchita appeared, bearing a wooden tray, on which there was fruit, food and drink. As she entered, they caught a glimpse of two fierce-looking Mexicans behind her, but she closed the door firmly in the faces of the guards.

Frank hastened to take the tray from her hands.

Ephraim grabbed her, literally beaming with delight.

"Gol-ding it all, Conchita, I'm tickled to death to see ye!" he spluttered.

"Hush! hush!" she whispered. "Have the caution. The men outside will hear."

"Yes, just lower that voice of yours a little, Gallup," warned Frank, in a low tone. "Don't get so exuberant."

"But yeou ain't told me how it is that yeou're here, Conchita," said the Vermonter. "Last time I see yeou was when you bid us *adios* at the old don's ranch."

"Eet ees not able I am to explain all," hastily whispered the girl. "My brother, he ees paid to help Señor Stockton. He ees here. Leesen! You here zose men singing?"

They stood quite still, and faintly, from some distant part of the old *hacienda*, came the sound of many voices in song.

"He ees zere," said the girl. "Zey are dreenking. Oh, eef zey will all geet the intoxication!"

"So they're whoopin' it up, be they?" said Gallup. "Waal, it might be a purty good thing if they all gut corned."

"Zey are dreenking the mescal. But eet ees not Señor Stockton nor Señor Mendez who weel dreenk eet. Mendez, he watch me all the time. I cannot geet away from him. Eet seems he have the suspicion of me."

"That's bad," said Merry.

"Eet ees vary, vary bad. Steel, mebbe I fool him. Hush! I know somezeeng about zis room zat nobody else know. One time zis *hacienda* belong to the vary reech man, who was the poleetical offender. He lif here in the great seclusion. But sometime he expect the officers to come for him. He have it feexed so when they come he git away—he hide. Seence I been here I find how he do eet. I find the secret passage."

"The secret passage?" breathed Merriwell, keenly interested.

"*Si, señor*, eet ees in zat wall." She pointed one finger toward the wall.

"There?" palpitated Frank.

"*Si, si*; but you must not try to find eet. Perhaps they catch you eef you do. You wait. You eat, you sleep, and take the rest. Bimeby, when the time come, I will help you. You trust Conchita. Deed you theenk, señor, that I would let The Wolf keel you? Ah—no! You are so braf. You are the brafest man I ever look at. I see it all. I watch the card game.

Santa Maria! I see you beat The Wolf, too. It make me tremble all over. Then I want to cry for joy when you beat him. Now I must go. Eef I stay longer, eet weel the suspicion arouse. Do as I say to you. Eat, sleep, and rest. Bimeby I will come."

She glided lightly to the door, paused, and partly turned to look over her shoulder and give Frank a glance from those wonderful, languishing eyes.

"Ah, the braf American!" she murmured softly. "*Magnifica!* Trust to Conchita. *Buenos noches, mi amigo.*"

When the door was opened, the sound of singing was more plainly heard. It was a wild and reckless song in the patois Spanish of the country that those men were chanting.

When Conchita was gone, Gallup danced awkwardly with delight.

"What did I tell you, Merry!" he palpitated. "We'll git aout of this, and don't you fergit it! Conchita's all right. Say, if I didn't have Teresa——"

"Tut, tut, Ephraim!" laughed Frank. "Why, you scoundrel, what do you mean?"

"Oh, but I've got Teresa," retorted Gallup, "and I'm tied up to her with a double and twisted knot. I was jest sayin' if I didn't have her, I might cast one eye in Conchita's direction. Naow, don't go to givin' me no lecture. Didn't I see yeou kiss her hand?"

"Oh, that's the custom of the country," said Merry smilingly.

"Custom be gol-dinged! I guess you wasn't thinkin' so much abaout custom as yeou was about that purty hand. Oh, yeou can't fool me, Frank. I guess she's a leetle bit smit on yeou, too. I see her give yeou the eye when she went aout."

"Don't talk foolish, Gallup," laughed Merry heartily. "Here is that grub you've been groaning for. Let's sit down and fortify the inner man."

It was a most delicious meal, and, when they had finished, Gallup settled back in his chair and stretched his long legs out with a sigh of relief.

"Waal, that's better," he grunted. "Now I've got to have a smoke. Where's my pipe? Where's my tobacco?"

"Pipe—tobacco?" said Frank. "Have you taken up smoking?"

"Say, yeou don't s'pose I'm livin' daown in this country, where every native puffs a cigarette and every Irishman pulls at a pipe, without gittin' the habit, do ye? Oh, I've heard yeou talk, Frank; and I s'pose yeou still stick to your practise. I don't blame yeou none. It was all right when we was at school. Boys

who smoke are chumps, for it certain does dull their brains; and cigarettes, same as some fellers used to smoke at school, has upset lots of 'em. But when a feller gits to be a man grown, and he plants a square meal under his vest, a good clay pipe jest tops it off in fine fashion. So here goes, by thutteration!"

It was not a clay pipe Ephraim produced, but it was a corncob, and, when it was lighted, the Vermonter began to roll forth clouds of smoke.

"I presume you can see the difference between your style of smoking and that of the natives down this way," said Frank. "They smoke cigarettes, it is true; but they don't smoke the way Americans do. A few puffs seems to satisfy them. They pick it up and smoke a bit now and then. The women down here are inclined to smoke."

"Inclined?" grinned Ephraim. "Why, gol-ding it! abaut all of them take a whiff."

"Yes; but neither the women nor men sit down to smoke, after the American fashion, and literally raise a thunder-cloud. Now, look at the smoke you're kicking up, Gallup. You're puffing away as if your life depended on it. A Mexican seems to smoke for pleasure, but an American smokes as if he meant to burn up as much tobacco as possible in a short time."

"Guess that's right," admitted the Vermonter. "But I've got the American habit, and it gives me satisfaction."

Finally Ephraim's pipe went out, his jaw dropped, permitting the corncob to fall to the floor, and a moment later he began to snore.

Also making himself as comfortable as possible, Frank extinguished one of the two remaining candles, and soon slept.

More than an hour had passed, when Merry awoke with a start, to find Conchita standing before him, one hand lifted in a warning gesture.

"Make not the sound!" she whispered. "Come, eet ees the time to try for the escape."

CHAPTER X.

THROUGH THE SECRET PASSAGE.

Frank was wide-awake in an instant.

Gallup continued to snore lustily, but Merry quickly rose and shook the Vermonter, pressing a smothering hand over his mouth as Ephraim awoke.

"Be still, Gallup," Frank whispered in his ear. "Conchita is here."

As he saw a look of comprehension come into the Vermonter's eyes, he stepped back.

"Derned if I wasn't dreaming I was hoeing potters on the old farm!" muttered the Yankee. "It was dratted hard work, too. My back was aching, and I had forty-one more long rows to hoe. That's the way it used to be when I was a boy. Thutteration! didn't I hate to hoe potters!"

"We're going to try a little hoeing of a different sort now," said Frank, in that guarded manner of his. "We're going to see if we can't get out of the clutches of these Wolves."

Gallup rubbed his back as he slowly straightened up.

"Guess I got a cramp on that old chair," he mumbled. "Howdy, Conchita. We're mighty glad to see ye, yeou bet yer!"

"Eet may be we haf trouble before away we can geet," whispered the girl, who seemed literally athrob with excitement. "I haf breeng you these weapon."

She thrust a heavy revolver into Frank's hand and gave Gallup another.

"Are they loaded?" asked Merry.

"Si, señor, they both haf the load. Ees eet how with them you know to shoot?"

"You leave that to us, by gum!" chuckled Gallup. "You oughter see Merry shoot! I bet a good Hubbard squash he can pick the buttons off Mendez's jacket at thirty paces!"

"Eet ees well," murmured the girl. "Eef you haf to shoot, do so; but I hope eet will not happen, for maybe my brother might be the one you heet."

"Then your brother is with these men?" questioned Merry. "We thought it might be that way."

"He ees here, and Pedro."

"Who is Pedro?"

"He ees the friend to me. He knows; he weel help. I tell heem everytheeng. He weel haf the four good horses ready."

"Are you sure you can trust Pedro?"

"Trust Pedro?" repeated Conchita. "He would geef his life for me."

Then Frank understood that Pedro was Conchita's lover.

"Well, that's good," said Merry. "Now, how do we get out of this trap?"

The girl caught up the candle, which had burned low and was flickering in its greasy socket. Holding it above her head with a graceful movement, she pointed toward the wall, and there the two young Americans saw a dark, rectangular opening, like a low doorway.

"Eet ees the way to the secret passage," explained the señorita. "By the passage we can geet down to the door that weel open into the *patio*. There we weel find Pedro and the horses."

"How are the men?" questioned Frank. "Has the mescal put them to sleep?"

"Almost the all of them," she answered. "My brother he sleep with the rest, so I theenk perhap there ees no danger to heem. But The Wolf, the Señor Stockton, he dreenk not at all."

"Well, lead on, Conchita. If we ever reach those horses, it will take more than a regiment of drunken men to stop us."

Even as the girl took the first step toward that open door in the wall, a sound reached their ears that caused their nerves to tighten like electrified wires.

Some one was at the door! The bolt moved in its sockets!

"Queek queek!" panted Conchita. "They come! The guard!"

Gallup made a leap and plunged into the darkness of that secret doorway. Conchita lingered for Frank to precede her, but he grasped her with his strong arms and pushed her ahead of him. As he did so, he glanced backward, and saw the door of the room flung wide open to admit Stockton himself, followed by two Mexicans, one of whom carried a flaring light.

Evidently The Wolf instantly understood what was happening, for a snarl came from his lips, his hand flew up, and there was a flash of fire and the dull, jarring report of a pistol

Merriwell felt the wind of the bullet as it passed his ear.

At the same instant Conchita blew out the candle with a puff of her breath.

In the darkness of the passage, Frank whirled and fired once. He aimed at the hand of the Mexican who was holding the flaring light aloft.

There was a cry of pain, and the light fell to the floor, being extinguished, and plunging the room into darkness. Then Merriwell was seized by the quivering hands of the Mexican girl, who pulled him along, chokingly crying:

"*Madre de Dios!* You weel be keeled! Hurry, señor, hurry!"

"Bad luck!" muttered Merriwell. "Somehow that sneaking wretch suspected what was happening, and he appeared just in time to kick up this racket and arouse the rest of the Wolves."

"Eef he catches me, he weel keel me!" breathed the excited girl.

"He'll not do that until after he has finished us," promised Frank. "We'll stand by you, Conchita, as long as we have strength to fight."

"Eet ees so brafe you are," she returned, as they pressed onward through the narrow passage.

Ahead of them there was a sudden racket and thumping, which ended with a thud and a spluttered volley of exclamations from the Vermonter.

"The stairs!" exclaimed Conchita. "He has found the stairs!"

"I should say so!" muttered Merry. "And he didn't stop long in descending them. Evidently he fell clean from the top to the bottom."

"Here they are. Careful, señor!"

Down the dark, mysterious staircase they hastened. At the foot they found Gallup, who had gathered himself up and was still spluttering.

"Hope you didn't break any bones, Ephraim."

"Gol-ding it! No, I guess not; but, by ginger! I bet I lost more'n two yards of good Yankee skin. Didn't know the dinged old stairs was thar, and I jest stepped right off inter space. Then I went scootin' down on the bridge of my nose."

"There are steel more stairs," warned the girl. "Keep close, and I weel tell you when we reach them."

Now they heard voices behind them in the passage. Stockton was shouting to his Mexican comrades, and, looking backward and upward, Merry saw him appear in the glare of light, which told that the torch had again been ignited. The light was behind The Wolf, and he was clearly outlined as he hesitated on the top-most stair.

Frank turned, with his pistol lifted and his finger on the trigger.

"I can end the difficulties of the Central Sonora in one second," he thought.

He was certain that he would not miss that dark figure if he fired. In fancy he saw himself shoot, saw Stockton fling up his arms and come thudding down the stairs, to land a lifeless heap at the bottom.

Who shall say Merriwell would not have been justified in shooting? The act would have been one of self-preservation, which is nature's first law. Still, Frank hesitated to stain his hands with human blood unless absolutely forced to do so.

Once more Conchita seized his elbow and tried to pull him along, at the same time wildly urging him to hasten.

He obeyed, and Stockton was spared.

The second flight of stairs was descended in safety,

and soon they came to the door at the end of the passage, which was so narrow that Conchita could not pass Gallup, who was ahead of her.

"Let me find the secret fastening!" she fluttered. "I know where eet ees. Stoop low, Señor Gallup, that I may reach ofer you."

He complied, while once more Frank Merriwell faced about to watch for their pursuers.

The light grew stronger in the passage, and again it silhouetted a human form.

"Halt where you are, Stockton!" rang out Merriwell's voice. "Another step, and I shall fire!"

Behind Frank, Conchita was panting:

"Oh, I cannot find eet, ze fastening! Where ees eet?"

With an oath, the gambler stood in his tracks, apparently seeking to peer into the gloom ahead of him.

"What are you trying to do, Merriwell, you fool?" he shouted. "You can't escape me!"

Frank fancied the man meant to shoot by calculation when he again heard the voice of one of the fugitives. Still Merry ventured to fling back a warning:

"Lift that pistol, and I'll drill you!" he threatened. "I can see you plainly in the light. You can't see me. The advantage is mine."

Evidently that was enough to cause The Wolf to hesitate. The man realized that Merriwell spoke the truth.

Conchita uttered a low cry of joy.

"I haf eet!" she exclaimed. "The door ees open! Come, come!"

They sprang out into the darkness of a flagged archway. The girl slammed the door behind them just as there was a muffled shot in the passage.

Evidently Stockton had fired, but his bullet was wasted.

Out from beneath the archway they fled into the courtyard, now made bright with the light of the moon. In a far corner of the yard were shadows and deep gloom, and there something seemed to move.

"Pedro! my Pedro!" called the girl.

"Hola, Conchita!" came back the glad answer.

Pedro was there, and with him were four saddled and bridled horses.

Within the building there was now no small uproar. Voices called loudly and hoarsely.

Even as the fugitives mounted the ready horses, two men rushed into the courtyard and sped across in the moonlight toward the wide-open gate.

"They are going to close the gate!" hissed Merry. "Charge, everybody!"

The flagstones of the courtyard gave out a mad clatter of hoofs that was echoed from the walls around as they shot forward toward the gate.

Frank had made no mistake, for the two Mexicans were seeking to close the last avenue of escape. Before they could accomplish the task, however, the fugitives were right upon them, and they leaped for their lives to get from beneath the hoofs of those galloping horses.

Merry uttered a shout of triumph as out into the open world they shot, with freedom ahead of them and the baffled Wolves behind.

CHAPTER XI.

AT DON JUAN'S "HACIENDA."

It was high noon.

Dressed in spotless white duck and taking his ease as he smoked a cigarette in the shade of the *hacienda* wall, lounged old Don Juan Espinazo.

A wild and adventurous life had this old man lived. In the fiery days of his youth, he had been a "patriot" officer in the ranks of the revolutionists. When the cause for which he fought met defeat and he was declared an outlaw, with a band of his followers he retired to the wilds of Sonora, where for years he followed the career of a Mexican bandit.

But now age had cooled his hot blood, and, having been pardoned by the government, the old man was content to pass his declining days in peace on the broad acres of his ranch.

To-day he had caused his big canvas chair to be placed there in the shadow of the wall, where he might sit, and smoke, and gaze away down the far-stretching valley where grazed his herds.

In spite of his years, the old don's eyes were keen as ever. Suddenly he stirred a bit and languidly lifted himself, with a slight show of interest. After a long look into the distance, he murmured:

"Some one approaches. Horsemen are coming yonder. Evidently I am to be honored with visitors."

In the days when his hair was untouched by the frosting fingers of time, the appearance of strangers in the distance would have instantly placed him on guard. Now, however, he had no premonition of danger, and he waited with something like pleasant anticipation for the unknown riders to approach.

As they came nearer, he saw there were four of them, and a few moments later he made certain that one was a female.

"They have ridden far and hard," murmured Don

Juan. "Their beasts are fagged and faltering. They will be hungry, thirsty, and tired."

Then he lifted his voice in a musical call, which soon brought a peon to his side.

"Hondo, have men ready to care for the horses of my visitors and give directions that refreshments are spread for them," said the don.

"*Si, señor,*" murmured the peon, and hastened away.

As the weary riders approached, the old don rose from his chair and stood waiting in a dignified manner to greet them. One of them waved a hat in the air, and the old don smiled.

"It is Ephraim, my beloved son," he said. "He brings friends with him. Ah! Teresa will be happy again to see the light of her life."

But it was not Ephraim at whom the old don gazed with keenest interest as the four approached. His eyes were fastened on the tanned face of another young American, who sat in the saddle as if a part of the horse he bestrode. As this young man drew rein and sprang to the ground, the old don hastened forward, with hand outstretched, his face wreathed in a welcome smile.

"Señor Merriwell," he cried softly, "it is the greatest pleasure of my old age to again behold you! Welcome to my home!"

Seeing them then, no one could have dreamed that these two men, the youth and the aged don, had once been most deadly enemies. But the noble treatment accorded Espinazo by the young American, who had conquered and defeated him, had been sufficient to turn bitter hatred into eternal friendship.

"I certainly am glad to see you again, Don Juan," said Merry, as he heartily shook the old man's hand.

"Welcome to you and your friends, brought thither by my beloved son," said Espinazo. "My home is yours, and all it contains."

Then came several peons, who took charge of the tired horses and led them away. The visitors followed the master of the *hacienda* into the coolness of the courtyard, where suddenly a graceful, dark-eyed woman came running to meet them and was folded in Gallup's strong arms.

"Here she is, Frank, by hemlock!" cried the proud Vermonter. "Here's Teresa! Jest take a look at her. She used to be a purty tarnal good-looker, but she gets handsomer and handsomer every day."

Blushing and murmuring, Teresa greeted Frank.

"It's the truth you speak," smiled Merry, regarding his friend's wife with frank admiration. "I agree with you in every particular."

They were escorted into the house, Teresa clinging to her husband and murmuring something in his ear.

"Sure, sure," chuckled Ephraim. "We'll jest take him right up and show him our offshoot."

Soon Merry found himself standing beside a genuine American baby crib, in which lay a sleeping child.

"There he is, by thutteration!" said Gallup, throwing out his chest. "That's the boy, Frank. Ain't he a ripper? Wake up thar, buster! Your paw is here, you rascal!"

He touched the baby's cheeks, and, with a smile, it opened its dark eyes and gazed wonderingly at them.

"Zoozy little wunky-chunky?" cried Gallup, as he lifted the infant from the crib and held it up.

"Looker them eyes, Frank; jest like his maw's. This is the fust time I ever beat you at anything in my life, Merry; but you ain't in it."

Then Ephraim danced awkwardly about with the child, who laughed, and smacked him on the cheek with one open chubby hand.

Teresa looked on with unspeakable pride, while the old don stood near, beaming at them all.

"Let me take him," urged Frank.

"Waal," said Gallup doubtfully, "I don't know's he'll go to you. He's jest a little shy of strangers. Don't like nobody to handle him but his maw and paw."

A moment later he was expressing his surprise, for the baby had shown no fear when transferred to Merry's arms. Instead of that, it cooed and jumped its little body with a movement indicating delight and desire to be playful.

"Waal, dern my punkins!" muttered Gallup. "The little reprobate certainly knows his friends. Never see him act that way before, did you, Teresa? Say, Frank, you look purty fine and fatherly yourself. Haw! haw! haw!"

To the surprise of all, having once been transferred to Frank, the child immediately set up a protest when they sought to take him away.

"Look out, Gallup, or you'll lose him," laughed Frank. "I shall be tempted to steal him. Let me keep him awhile. I'll just sit down here with him and talk it over. We'll have a sociable little time together."

"Say, you oughter see the cute things he does sometimes," said Gallup. "Why, once when I called him Jim Jeffries, he up and punched me right plumb in the eye. And dinged if I don't believe he can talk some. You oughter hear him. Why, he says 'goo-goo' jest as plain as can be."

"Goo-goo," said the baby.

"Thar, didn't I tell ye!" whooped Gallup. "Did you ever hear one talk as young as that?"

"Never," confessed Frank laughingly.

Merry sat down with the baby cuddled in his arms in such a manner that the little fellow could reach his face and explore it with curious fingers.

Teresa whispered something to her husband.

"All right," said Ephraim; "go ahead. I guess Frank can take keer of the child. Git the fodder together, for we're jest abaout as empty as a drum, the whole of us."

Pedro and Conchita were escorted away by Teresa, who had been delighted to see her cousin in this unexpected manner. The old don followed them to the door and finally excused himself, leaving Frank with the baby.

Fifteen or twenty minutes later Ephraim and Teresa returned to that room to call Merry. Outside the door they paused, listening to the cradle song Frank was singing. They looked at each other, and the light that lay deep in their eyes was that fairest glow ever beheld by man on land or sea. Their hands met, and like children they tiptoed closer to the door and peered in.

There was Frank, with the child's head pillow'd on his shoulder, its cheek against his and its eyes closed in the sweet repose that had been wooed by the cradle song.

CHAPTER XII.

MEN OF TIGERISH MOLD.

Refreshments were followed by a brief siesta, during which Merriwell slept and recuperated.

The old don was waiting for him when he awoke.

"I have heard much of the story from my most respected and honored son," said Espinazo. "I know not this man they call The Wolf, but Mendez I know well. He is a sneak. It is marvelous you were not murdered."

"We should be thankful that we escaped with our lives," admitted Frank.

"It is so, señor; but while you slept other visitors have appeared. Step to this balcony, where we can look into the *patio*."

From a balcony they looked down into the courtyard, and there, to his surprise, Merry saw nearly half-a-hundred brigandish-appearing men, all fully armed and seeming ready for some desperate enterprise.

"Who are they?" he exclaimed, in astonishment.

"Yonder slender man you see," said the don, pointing toward one of the band beneath, who seemed to have an air of command about him, "was once Mendez's trusted comrade. His name is Maro. Mendez was jealous of him, and at one time they quarreled over a *señorita*. Although the quarrel was settled without bloodshed, Mendez nourished in his heart deepest hatred for Maro. He was treacherous, and therefore he planned to betray Maro into the hands of the military. His dastardly plot worked perfectly, and Maro was captured, while Mendez escaped. Of course Maro was sentenced to death. He has told me how it was he escaped, a most marvelous story. He did not die beneath the guns of the executioners, and he is here, although for months he has been in hiding and lived the life of a dog. When he escaped, he swore vengeance on Mendez. At last the time has come; and he has gathered up this band of men, all of whom are my old followers. They all know me by reputation. Maro trusts me. That's why he is here. I have told Maro that you know where it is possible Mendez may be found. Do you think you could lead those men to the place?"

Frank hesitated a moment before replying.

"On one condition," he said.

"And that is what, señor?"

"That I have absolute command of those tigers, for tigers they certainly appear to be. They must obey me in every particular. I must be the leader, Maro my lieutenant."

The old don shrugged his shoulders.

"It is possible he will not agree to such terms," he said. "Still I am not certain. I will tell him what I know of you. But why do you ask it?"

"I am willing that Maro should settle his trouble with Mendez, should he choose, if I bring them together, but Stockton I claim as my own prey."

"You will kill that man?"

"Oh, no, Don Espinazo, I shall not kill him unless forced to do so. I have had my opportunity. I might have shot him as we fled through the secret passage of the old ranch. A pistol was in my hand, and its muzzle was turned upon him. I did not fire."

Don Juan regarded the young American in a singular manner.

"Even yet I do not understand you, *amigo*," he confessed. "You might have destroyed me long ago when we were enemies, yet you refrained, and now we are friends. It is a strange manner in which you deal with your enemies. Still you conquer them. How it comes about I cannot say."

"It's not my place to take the execution of the law into my hands," said Merry.

"Are you aware, Señor Merriwell, that the law of this country may not punish Señor Stockton? My respected and honored son tells me he believes the government would willingly see this gambling American ruin the railroad you are building and bring all its work to naught."

"Without doubt Ephraim is correct. But I believe Tom Stockton is wanted in the States for crimes committed there. I shall endeavor to take him out of Mexico, a captive, and let the law of my own country deal with him."

"Ah! I see," murmured the old man. "You will make yourself much trouble, however—much unnecessary trouble. If you were to give the command, those men you call tigers would dispose of the gambling American, should he be caught."

"I have stated the conditions on which I will lead them against Stockton and Mendez," said Frank. "Shall I not accompany you and speak with Maro?"

"If you choose, señor."

They descended and mingled with those ferocious-looking men, who eyed Frank curiously. The old don introduced Merriwell and Maro. The bandit bowed with grace and ease as he acknowledged the presentation.

"It is the honor of my life, señor," he murmured. "The don has spoken to me of you. He tells me that only the night past you escaped from the hands of the enemy I seek. When I find this man, señor, my steel shall drink his blood, and he'll bother you no more."

Beneath the cool, smooth manner in which Maro spoke there was a certain chilling deadliness that plainly bespoke his intense and bitter hatred for the treacherous wretch who had betrayed him.

"The don will tell you on what conditions I'll lead you and your men against Mendez," said Frank.

Maro listened as Espinazo spoke. For one moment he surveyed Frank from head to feet as if in doubt. The aged host noted the look and hastened to remind Maro that this youthful American was the one who had mastered and conquered Black Jerez himself. At this, Maro bowed again.

"From your lips I know it is true, Don Juan," he said. "He must be a brave man and a great fighter, else you would not say so. What do you advise me to do?"

"It is my advice that you accept him for your commander for the time being. I am certain you can trust him."

"Then it shall be so," said Maro. "I am pledged to you, and I pledge you each and all of my men, whom you see about you. When will you be ready to start?"

"Inside of thirty minutes," answered Frank. "I can start in a third of that time, if you wish."

"It is well."

Then Maro lifted his voice and made a signal which brought those fierce-looking ruffians flocking to the spot, where they gathered and listened when he addressed them.

"My comrades," he said, "you have sworn to obey me in all things. Is it not true?"

"It is true, captain," they answered.

"Then, comrades, you are to make ready again to ride, and ride hard and far. Don Espinazo has graciously given me the use of the best horses from his stables. Our mounts will be fresh. If the saints favor us, ere the moon pales and wanes to-night we'll meet the traitor Mendez, and I will settle with him."

They murmured their satisfaction in fierce, low voices.

"But from this time until I tell you differently, you are to implicitly obey the command of this American, my friend, Señor Merriwell. He is now your leader, and I am his lieutenant."

Although some of those fierce rascals betrayed surprise in their looks, by no word did they express it.

As Merry looked them over, he recalled the time when he had commanded thirty desperadoes in defense of his mine in Arizona. But not even his "Terrible Thirty" had composed such a band of picturesque and unscrupulous-appearing men. These bravos of Mexico were the very limit.

Frank hastened from the courtyard and entered the house to make ready for the start. Just within the door he came face to face with Conchita. She stood there, half blocking the passage.

"Oh, señor," she murmured, "I know what eet ees you mean to do. I know you are going back there to encounter those bad men. Your life weel be in the great danger. Perhap you may be keeled!"

"Don't worry about me, Conchita," said Merry, with a queer feeling. "I shall try to take care of myself for the sake of my wife."

She started as if shot, and her face turned very pale.

"Your wife?" she whispered. "You are marreed?"

"Yes."

"I deed not know. Eet ees right that you should have the caution for her sake. I will pray to the saints for your safety, señor. *Adios!*"

But, when he had passed on, she stood there, pressing her hands to her throbbing heart.

"Marreed," she whispered, "and I deed not know! Oh, well, perhap eet ees better, for, if Pedro knew the truth, he would keel me."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE WOLF MEETS HIS MASTER.

Of course Merriwell was aware that the game might be flown. Still he hoped such would not prove the case. It seemed scarcely probable that Mendez and The Wolf would take alarm over his escape, for they would reckon that he could do little in the next few days to disturb them. Besides that, it would require some time for the Mexicans who had caroused by drinking mescal to recover from the effects of the debauch. It seemed likely that those men would not think of moving until the following day. In such a case, Frank Merriwell and the tigerish band who aided him would find the prey unaware and unprepared.

"Gol-ding it if thar ain't liable to be a hot time before mornin'!" muttered Gallup, as he rode by Merry's side. "Teresa didn't want me to come. She was skeert that I'd git punctured with a bullet or carved up by a toad-sticker. Say, Frank, it does give me a mighty queer feeling up and daown my spiral column jest to look araound at this gang. If the old don hadn't said they was all right, I'd never trusted my hide with 'em."

"It's sometimes a good plan to fight fire with fire," said Merry. "You remember the old saying about setting a thief to catch a thief."

The moon came up at last and soared high in the cloudless sky. On and on rode that strange band across the plains, along the valleys, and through the hills.

The morning star was paling a bit when the dark outlines of the *hacienda* they sought loomed before them. Slackening speed, they approached it slowly and cautiously.

Not a light gleamed. The place seemed deserted.

"Ding my potters if I don't believe the whole bunch has skedaddled!" said Gallup regretfully.

"We'll soon know if they have," came from Frank.

The gate was open, and at a low command from Merry the whole band went clattering into the courtyard, sending up a wild shout.

Suddenly the place awoke. There were sounds within the *hacienda*. Lights flashed. Men were there. The Wolves were trapped!

Frank led a body of those desperadoes, and they bat-

tered down a door and went tramping and cursing into the building. The voice of Maro was lifted in challenge.

"Mendez, thou cowardly dog," he shouted, "come and face me! Come and die at my hand! Hide not, thou craven wretch, for I will find thee!"

Suddenly there were shots and the sharp clash of battle, for the aroused wretches stood on the defensive. In a brief space of time half-a-dozen miniature battles were being waged within the rooms of that old building. Men met, and grappled, and fought furiously.

Amid all the turmoil and carnage, Frank Merriwell hurried from room to room, searching for The Wolf. He found Stockton at last, standing alone by an open door, a pistol in his hand.

"Surrender!" cried Frank, leveling his own weapon at the gambler.

"To blazes with you!" snarled Stockton, as he fired and fled.

Merry leaped aside, as he saw the man's hand rise, and the act saved his life, for the bullet clipped a piece from his sleeve.

Stockton had disappeared into the darkness. Merriwell caught up a heavy candlestick, in which a candle was burning, and fearlessly rushed in pursuit. He came to a flight of stairs, which led upward, and these quickly brought him out upon the flat roof of the building. A sudden breath, that seemed to come from the lips of the awaking morning, extinguished the candle.

Not fifteen feet away, Stockton was standing with his pistol ready.

"You fool!" he said harshly. "You've come to your death! I can shoot you before you can lift your gun!"

They stood thus, staring at each other, while the eastern sky took on a faint pearly tint. From the house beneath them still rose sounds of deadly conflict. In the courtyard men were shouting, and a pistol shot was fired.

"You trapped me, Merriwell," admitted the gambler. "I didn't expect it. I don't understand how you did it in such a lively fashion. It's plain your men have the best of mine, for we were taken by surprise. Old Gripper was right in thinking you a good fighter, but you can't conquer Tom Stockton."

"You acknowledge you're trapped," said Merry. "You're conquered now."

"Not at all," was the cool retort. "I have you under the muzzle of my gun, and I'll not miss you if I fire again. Therefore, I'm in condition to make terms with you. I don't care a picayune about those greaser

dogs below. It's nothing to me if they eat each other up. I'm looking out for Tom Stockton. I believe you're a man of your word. Swear to me that you'll permit me to go free, and I'll spare your life. Otherwise I shall shoot you, and take my chances of escape. Speak quickly! Do you swear?"

Merry seemed to hesitate, half drawing back the hand which held the heavy bronze candlestick.

"Why should I agree to such terms?" he said. "I'm here to take you, dead or alive!"

"You'll never accomplish it! Instead of that, you'll waste your own life."

"We shall see."

With a sudden sharp snap of his arm, Frank hurled the candlestick at Stockton. At the same instant he dropped on the stairs and once more escaped by a hair's breadth, for The Wolf fired as he noted the determined youth's movement.

Stockton, however, did not escape the missile hurled by Merry. It struck him fairly in the pit of the stomach and stretched him on the roof, his pistol flying from his fingers.

Before he could recover, Merriwell came at him with pantherish bounds and pinned him fast.

"It's no use, Stockton," said Frank. "This is our second game of life and death. I defeated you before. You've played your last card this time, and you're defeated again."

The gambler made one desperate effort to fling the youth off and rise, but he was almost as helpless as an infant in Merry's clutch.

"I regret to say that I believe you're right," he finally gasped. "But you're the first man who ever beat me at any game."

Hurriedly Merry searched him for weapons, taking a second pistol from him.

"I've known men of your sort who would not break an oath," observed Frank. "Apparently from the sounds the battle is practically over, and I am certain my Tigers are triumphant. Will you give me your word not to make another offensive movement or an effort to get away from me?"

"Yes," said Stockton, with evident reluctance. "I promise."

"Then you may get up," said Frank, as he rose.

The gambler turned over slowly, seeming to be in some distress. As he straightened up, he placed his hand to his chest, and then, like a flash, he launched himself at Frank, the waning moonlight glinting on a bit of polished steel.

"You dog!" cried Merriwell, as he dodged and

clutched Stockton's wrist, stopping the blow of the knife. "You most treacherous of curs!"

With all the strength of his arm, he drove his hard fist against the point of Stockton's jaw, and the gambler sank limp and senseless to the roof.

Merry stepped quickly to the edge of the roof and looked down into the courtyard. A thrilling spectacle met his gaze. Down there two men were fighting for their lives, while more than a dozen others stood calmly looking on.

Even as Frank looked down he saw a blow and beheld one of the two sink to the ground. Then the triumphant voice of Mero cried:

"That is the reward of thy treachery, Mendez, thou dastard!"

"Gol-ding it all, Frank!" cried a voice behind Merry. "I've been huntin' everywhere for ye. The scrap is over. It's been a rip-tearer, but them Tigers of yours have done the job; and I'll bet a good Baldwin apple that the Railroad Wolves won't trouble us no more."

"I think not, myself," said Frank, as he turned to meet Gallup. "Here lies their leader and organizer. He's not seriously hurt, but we'll tie him securely and take him along with us to Mesquite, where Old Gripper shall say what is to be done with him."

THE END.

The Next Number (507) Will Contain

Frank Merriwell's Treasure Guard;

OR,

The Defenders of the Pay Train.

The Captive and the Traitor—A Stranger in Quijano—The Indian Awakes—“Heap Good Game”—The Mysterious Mexican—In the Chaparral—By the Fire-light—The Hand of Friendship—The Traitor—In the Haunted Cave—In the Silent Night—At the Head of Construction—Frank Delivers the Money.

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TIP TOP ROLL OF HONOR.

Following the suggestion of Mr. Burt L. Standish, that appeared in his letter to Tip Top readers in No. 480, the following loyal Tip Toppers have won for themselves a place on our Honor Roll for their efforts to increase the circulation of the King of Weeklies. Get in line boys and girls and strive to have your name at the head of the list

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Roy R. Ball, 902 Olive Street, Texarkana.
Fred F. Blake, 1512 E. 10 St., Kansas City, Mo.

The names of other enthusiastic Tip Toppers will be added from time to time. Send in the result of your efforts to push the circulation of your favorite weekly and win a place on the Roll of Honor.

APPLAUSE.

Owing to the number of letters received, the editors of Tip Top cannot undertake to secure their publication under six weeks. Those who contribute to this department must not expect to see them before that time.

When I first laid my eyes on a TIP TOP, I thought it all trash and nonsense, but I was mistaken when I read my first one. I have read all classes of fiction, and as good as they are, none can compare with TIP TOP. It is a pity that the stories are not a few chapters longer. I have not read about Frank Merriwell, and do not know what he is like. I can't see how Dick could have mercy on such fellows as Skeene and that Mexican Tulla, for instance, in "Dick Merriwell Shadowed," when he and Buckhart were on the cliff and when the Mexican and his two villains fired a treacherous volley at them. If I had been in Dick's place I would have given them a dose of their own medicine. But tumbling the rocks on them was the best of all. I'll warrant there will be great lamenting when Burt L. Standish leaves us. Giving my best regards to Street & Smith, yours truly,

Sault Ste. Marie, Mich.

A. G.

It was too bad that you missed reading the wonderful stories about Frank Merriwell; he was so clever and so manly. But you have another young idol of the American boy, Dick Merriwell. Isn't he just the kind of a young man you would like to have for a friend? So you would like to have some of the chapters longer? Think of some readers who like the stories so well that they have asked us to publish the TIP TOP WEEKLY every day, just like a newspaper!

I take pleasure in this being my first letter to your Applause. Bulwer said: "The pen is mightier than the sword." I have read many numbers of the TIP TOP. As for the best character, I take Frank Merriwell. For the best girl I will pick out June. I sent a letter to you to become a member of the TIP TOP baseball league for 1906. Chester Arlington is a contemptible fool. I give a hearty congratulation to Burt L. for being the author of the greatest weekly on the face of the globe. I remain, your constant admirer,

BENJAMIN CASHMAKER.

Pueblo, Colo.

Frank Merriwell you like better than many others in the stories, but remember that Dick also has as fine qualities as his brother. If you follow him carefully through the various numbers you will soon observe this.

I guess I will have to write a few lines about the TIP TOP WEEKLY and its characters. Dick and June are the two best characters in the stories, I think. I will close, by writing a short poem and wishing a long life to Burt L. Standish and Street & Smith, hoping to see this in print instead of the wastebasket.

HURRAH FOR DICK.

To write a little poem I'll take a little time,
Although, if I am any judge, it is a bad old rhyme.
Of all the boys in this great land, Dick Merriwell is the best;
Of all his enemies, Chet Arlington is a pest.

Buckhart is both stanch and true;
Tubbs and Darrell are others, too.
Others who would fight for him, on the run,
Are Smart, Flint and Bob Singleton.

Other boys, who, though no smarter,
Are Bradley, Jolliby and Gardner.
Dick has friends in every little place,
But to write of them would take too much space.

Now 'tis time to change my tune
And write about girls, especially June.
She, unlike her brother, who makes me sick,
Will make a very good mate for Dick.

Doris and Felicia are friendly to him,
But Zona Desmond can't make his head swim.
So here's to TIP TOP, which is certainly the rage.
I hope to see this on the Applause page.

I. M. DUNN, one of the Jolly Rovers.
Minneapolis, Minn.

Here we have one of the "Jolly Rovers" singing away with all his might.

I have just finished reading No. 492 of your famous weekly, and having read TIP TOP ever since it was published, I think I am capable of expressing my high esteem of this excellent weekly. I have read all of the other weeklies, but the TIP TOP knocks them all sky high.

LEON S. SMITH.

Hobart, N. Y.

A reader who has taken the TIP TOP year after year for the last nine years certainly deserves to have his name put on the Roll of Honor. May you read the TIP TOP WEEKLY for another nine years!

I have been a faithful reader of TIP TOP for at least four years and have encouraged the sale of TIP TOP all I can; and also formed a TIP TOP club two years ago, of which I am the secretary. We started with five members, but there are only three

at present, but when this year's subscription runs out we will start with five members again. In my estimation there is nothing better than TIP TOP. The Tip Top Club wishes "a long and happy life" to "Frank and Inza." I am glad Dick and Brad are going back to Fardale. Please don't wastebasket this, but put it in Applause column. Long life to Burt L. Standish and Street & Smith,

EDW. W. PRITNER.
Curllsville, Pa.

You have done such good work for TIP TOP that the only thing left to do is to put your name on the Roll of Honor!

I have just finished reading No. 492 of the king of weeklies, TIP TOP.

Frank has married Inza, and I hope when Dick gets older he will marry June. Brad is O.K.

I wish Burt L. would write one copy of TIP TOP, just to see how Chet is running things in Fardale.

Why couldn't you put in a character from California, "the Golden West?"

Am I helping TIP TOP? Well, I guess yes. I have convinced several boys of its merits, who have hereto read other books, and now they would not go without it.

As this letter is getting too long, I will close, with three cheers for Burt L., Dick, Brad, Frank and his wife, and the rest of the bunch,

WM. BOZBACK.

Sacramento, Cal.

Your suggestion is a good one. Perhaps Mr. Standish will introduce a "native son of the Golden West" in a future number.

Having read TIP TOP for about six years, I wish to express my opinion about it.

I am a student from Wentworth Military Academy. I like to read TIP TOP where Dick is at Fardale, as it reminds me of school; in fact, I like to read all of them. I can hardly wait until Friday comes around to get my old friend, TIP TOP, as it is the best friend anyone can have. Of the characters, I like Dick the best; then comes old Brad, the Texan.

I would like you to send me a catalogue, as I want to get some of the back numbers. With best wishes to Street & Smith and Burt L. Standish, I am, a true Tip Topper,

Box 974, Kansas City, Mo.

JOHN A. MERONEY.

Mr. Standish's pictures of life in boarding school are so vivid that many a young man has persuaded his father to allow him to go away from home to prepare for college. School days are the happy days, and those who have been fortunate enough to have been sent away to boarding school always look back to that period as the pleasantest in their lives.

Having read your TIP TOPS, I thought I would put in my word of praise.

If boys would follow the example of the Merriwell boys and their friends, I think there would be a better class of boys in the world to-day.

If anyone would like to correspond with a girl from central Illinois, and would let me know through the TIP TOP, I would be glad to do so.

I don't like signing my name, for I think it is the boy's place to do so, and I sign myself,

A GIRL FROM CENTRAL ILLINOIS.

Canton, Ill.

What you say about young men following in the footsteps of Frank Merriwell is very true. So many boys have already been benefited by Frank's good example that their cases prove the truth of your remark. The chivalry, the honesty, square dealing and manliness of this noble young man has had a wonderful influence on the character of thousands of American boys.

With the approach of autumn we again take up our pen to advise you of our progress in starting a football team.

Last year we had a most successful team and were not defeated.

Our lineup this year will be very strong, and is composed of the best players to be found hereabouts. Among our most promising players are John Cann Ehretzman, who enters Mercersburg, and William Zegi Casey, who contemplates entering Lesterine Manual Training School. These men, with the assist-

ance of Francis Plankinton Hefferman and William Heybeck Feinberg, comprise our men behind the line. They are all speedy men and will be heard from in some big college soon.

On the accompanying page is our present lineup and the players' weights.

Lineup of the "Greengard" Athletic Club: Sam Runter Martin, center, weight, 187 pounds; Edw. Bone Driscoll, right guard, 175 pounds; Robt. Miller Hempstead, right tackle, 168 pounds; Harold Porto Vortigern, right end, 152 pounds; Nelson Nolan, left guard, 189 pounds; Emory Mains, left tackle, 178 pounds; Benj. Yokust, left end, 147 pounds; Wm. Zegi Casey, left half-back, 184 pounds; Wm. Heybeck Feinberg, right half-back, 181½ pounds; John Cann Ehretzman, full-back, 193 pounds; Francis Plankinton Hefferman, quarter-back, 123 pounds. Substitutes, John Putz and Orvie Morgan Goodrich.

Thanking you in advance, I am, yours truly,
Binghamton, N. Y.

WILLIAM SMITH, Mgr.

TIP TOP expects to hear great things from your team this fall. It is made up of good "husky" players, and should give your opponents a hard tussle. May the "Greengard Athletic Club" be ever victorious.

Having read TIP TOP more or less—mostly more, for after reading one copy, I generally read it some more while waiting for the next one—for two hundred and forty-six weeks; that is to say, about half the entire numbers, I think TIP TOP and all connected with it are O.K. The characters are all good, but some are better than others.

This is the third time I have written. If I don't see this, I will think the Applause is all fiction. Respectfully yours,
Springfield, Ill.

MACK CARTER.

Your other letters probably appeared some weeks that you did not get the weekly. Sometimes a person will skip this way, and it is just their luck to have their letters appear just at that time. But here is your third one, and it will be nobody's fault but yours if you don't see it in print.

I have been reading the Applause, and as I haven't seen any letters from this part of Washington, have ventured to write the following.

TIP TOP! How dear that name has become to the young Americans. How much we owe to Burt L. Standish can never be known, as he has filled a long-felt want in literature for the rising American.

Four years ago my brother was taken sick. I began getting him a lot of weeklies to read. Among them was a TIP TOP. After reading it we decided to drop all others and read the TIP TOP as long as it was published. That was four years ago, and we have never missed a number since. Anxiously we watch for Friday, TIP TOP day.

In Frank's crowd, Bruce Browning and Bart Hodge are my favorites. If Elsie does not secure Bart soon she wants to look out for me.

I like Doris and Brad the best of Dick's friends. I must not forget old Joe Crowfoot, even if he does get bloodthirsty once in a while.

Dear little Doris is worth a dozen Junes. Let June have Dick if she wants to; Doris and Brad are as good.

I love baseball, and wish I could see Dick and Brad.
Bellingham, Wash.

BLUE-EYED WASHINGTON GIRL.

There are no cloth-bound volumes of TIP TOP. You probably can find a bookbinder in your town who will bind all your old TIP TOPS in an inexpensive binding. You and your brother have had four years of the best reading obtainable, and we are glad to hear that you both intend to read the library so long as it is published.

I have been a reader of TIP TOP for three years, and think it is "the best ever." All the characters are fine, but I think I like Frank, Bart, Jack Diamond, Dick and Brad the best. Jack and Brad are ideal Southerners, and Frank has no better friend than Jack. I wish "Rex V." would give me his address, as I would like to meet him. I hope some of the stories will soon be about Frank, as I like those the best. Boys, have you any old numbers of TIP TOP from 1 to 300 that you want to sell? If so, please write me, stating numbers. I hope Dick will go to Yale

soon and take his Fardale chums with him. What has become of Duke Derringer, who was one of the pitchers on Merry's Maplewood ball team? Will he ever appear in the stories again? Three cheers and a tiger for Burt L. Standish, Street & Smith and the Merriwells. Hoping to see this in the Applause column, I am, very truly yours,

WILL J. PARRISH.
Richmond, Va.

The early numbers of TIP TOP are out of print. You will have to leave it to Mr. Standish whether Duke Derringer makes his appearance again. Any of the characters who seem to disappear are apt to pop up when you least expect to see them.

Last week I obtained a few numbers of TIP TOP. Before reading them I was presented with about ten very old TIP TOPS. The covers were off, but the story was there, and I read and read until I finished them. Then I started on the others and have almost finished them. I feel like kicking myself for not having read every one of them from 1 to present number. I am forever reading novels, but never have I run against stories that I liked as much. I now think I will close, wishing you all luck and success,

OSCAR GIRARD.

114 Bushwick Avenue, Brooklyn, N. Y.

It is surprising how many people say the same thing about TIP TOP. They have neglected to read the early numbers and now are trying to make up for lost time.

As I have written you several times, and have never seen any of my letters in print, I will write my last time, asking you to put this in print. I will be glad when I see this in the Applause column of the famous TIP TOP, and I am sure you will do so, as I have been a constant reader of TIP TOP for the last three years. I would like very much to correspond with my other brother readers, and I am sure they will have a reply by return mail.

I like Frank, Dick and Cap'n Wiley best of all; then, Brad and Stretcher.

Hoping this will miss the wastebasket and be in print in next issue, I will close, with three cheers to Burt L. Standish, the famous writer, and kind regards to Street & Smith. I remain, yours very truly,

C. G. PFEIFFER.

123 West Government Street, Pensacola, Fla.

It is strange how your other letters missed us. But we will make sure that this one goes in the Applause column. So you have joined that large army of readers who have taken the weekly constantly for the last three years? You are welcome to its ranks!

I have been a silent reader of your most interesting paper for the past three years, and I now think it about time to declare myself. Anybody who does not think TIP TOP is on top, and does not admire the characters in it the way Mr. Standish shows us, should be banished from this fair land of ours. I will not attempt to give my views in regard to the way in which the girl characters shall fall to the boys, leaving that serious problem to Mr. Standish, for I think he can arrange it a whole lot easier than I could. I admire Dick and Brad and their crowd, but am still a member of the old guard in saying I like Frank Merriwell and his flock the best. In No. 484 I see a letter signed "Miss Brown Eyes," which says that the writer is willing to correspond with any other reader. A letter sent to the address below will be promptly attended to, or a letter from any other reader will also have prompt attention. Hoping to see this in print, as it is my first attempt of giving my opinion on your valuable paper, I will close.

With best wishes to the publishers and readers and to Burt L. Standish, I remain,

WALTER D. CHICK.

531 Westmoreland Street, Philadelphia, Pa.

While you like the old flock in TIP TOP, there are a large number who think that the new flock is all right. After you have a few more of the stories, perhaps we shall add you, too, to this swelling list of admiring readers.

Please publish the following in TIP TOP: I wish to collect souvenir post cards from all the States and Territories, or from foreign countries, and would be glad to exchange one for one

with any of the readers. I close, hoping success to Street & Smith and Burt L. Standish. I remain, a constant reader.

GEORGE S. THOMPSON.

35 South Sycamore Street, Petersburg, Va.

No doubt a number of readers who are also collecting picture postal cards would be glad to exchange with you.

I am a loyal Tip Topper and have secured twelve new readers during the last week, and expect to get more by forming the Boys' Tip Top Association of the Bronx. I am president, and one of our laws is that every member who can read English must read TIP TOP. As the dues are ten cents per week, five cents of each member's dues buys him a TIP TOP. We have had a debate, in which it was resolved that Dick Merriwell is greater than his brother. We could not decide the winner. As I think I'm writing too much, I close, with three cheers for TIP TOP.

WM. SCHWARTZ, President B. T. T. A. of the Bronx.
New York City.

Your efforts to increase the number of readers in your vicinity are very commendable, and we appreciate your good will. We feel that you deserve to have your name placed on the TIP TOP Roll of Honor.

Just a little daubing of the black to give you the exact idea of one of the profession. I've been doing time for several years on the American stage, and pride myself as being a full-fledged actor. From 'Frisco to New York I've wended my way, unmenaced by cabbages, nor again bouquets in the shape of canceled contracts. 'Twas to relate my experience as a reader of your most excellent weekly paper, the TIP TOP. Do I smoke? Nix. Do I drink? Never. Allow me to stop here. If I finish that sentence I may encroach on the sacred grounds of truth. I settled myself to relate what the TIP TOP means to actors on the American or foreign stage. Watch a victim of the profession. By those words I mean a person who is following up this business. Watch him. When he is not playing his part, writing for engagements, eating or sleeping—what is he doing? An easy question to answer. He is reading, and foremost among his *Clipper*, *Billboard*, *Mirror*, or other prominent paper in our line of business, you will see the TIP TOP WEEKLY. See the machinist, electrician, lawyer, etc., even to the office and messenger boy—all of them read TIP TOP. They can't help it; that's flat. They know the story under the covers of this five-cent novel. They know half their life is beneath the sod and the dew if they let the luxury of reading TIP TOP go by them. "All the world's a stage; and all the people on it are its actors." 'Tis true, but no one can act the part of a TIP TOP reader if he has never read this valuable paper. When a traveling company leaves any town, any one of my readers may go through the stage door—if he is not molested by the doorman—and into any dressing-room occupied by an actor, and I'll guarantee he may be able to find one or more copies of Burt L. Standish's works. I know several stock company men who literally fed on TIP TOPS. This happened when the coin was not forthcoming—when the angel held his wings low. In the theatrical world any amount of actresses likewise enjoy this ideal story-book. How can they help it? The story relates the adventures of two upright, A No. 1 Yankee lads. The elder of the two was a victim of the stage. He struck the stock, stepped to the front of a show, wrote a play, and when one stock went to the wall he picked the stranded lot up and gave them engagements in his own play. Did ever an actor go upward like Frank Merriwell? I never did. I'm now in Pittsburg; in another week it's me to good old New York, the home of TIP TOP. May this valuable literature prosper as of old. May it double its subscription and become the crowning paper of the universe, as it is of the sister novels now in circulation. I am one of the millions who are weekly entertained with TIP TOP, and I will ever remain as such. Prosperity to Street & Smith, Burt L. Standish, TIP TOP and all of its readers. I am, your most humble servant,

Anywhere, U. S. A.

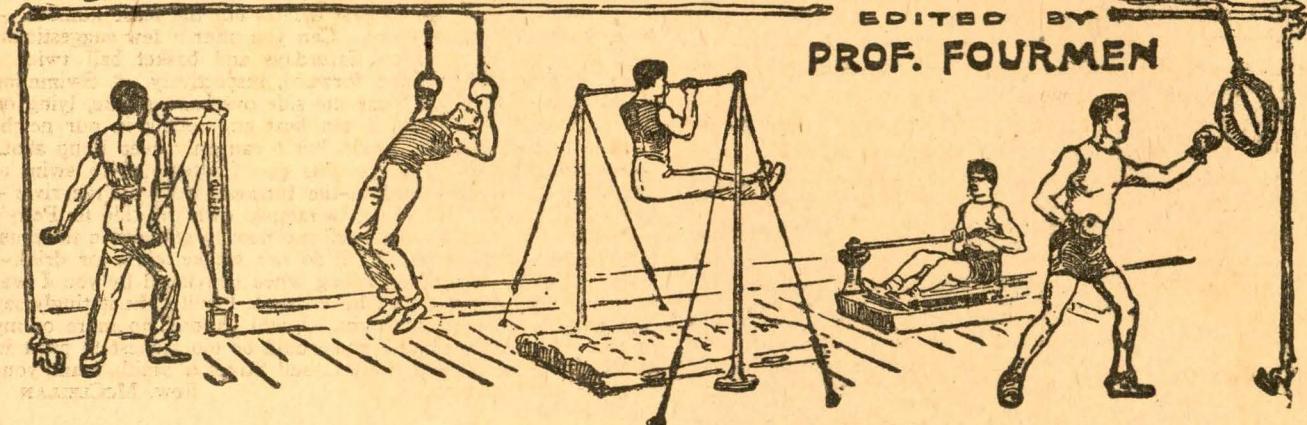
AN ACTOR.

Our actor-friend is in a facetious mood and writes entertainingly of the ups and downs of his profession. He shows such buoyant spirits that we feel that misfortune never has any real terrors for him. He goes his way with a cheerful heart and a bundle of TIP TOPS in his trunk, feeling that he has the two essentials for happiness and can stand the hard knocks of the world without having them sour his disposition.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS.

EDITED BY

PROF. FOURMEN



PROF. FOURMEN: Having read your king of weeklies for nearly four years, I hope you will grant me the privilege to ask you a few questions: Age, 19 years; height, 5 feet 4½ inches; chest, 35½ inches; expanded, 37½ inches; biceps, right, 11½ inches; expanded, 13½ inches; left, 11 inches; expanded, 13 inches; thighs, right, 19 inches; left, 19½ inches; weight, 136 pounds; calves, right, 13 inches; left, 12½ inches; wrists, right, 6½ inches; left, 6¾ inches. Is taking a cold plunge in open salt water in the middle of November harmful? Should you go in while heated? Does hard work stunt a person? What are my weak points? I remain, yours for success,

Greenport, L. I.

G. A. WIGGINS.

Your measurements are good. You certainly have a constitution like iron to withstand the shock of a November plunge in open water. All I can say is that, if you want to put your foot into an early grave, continue that sort of bathing. I am compelled to admire your hardihood in this matter more than your discretion. Very hard and exhausting work, indulged in to any great extent during the period of boyhood, may stunt a person's growth.

PROF. FOURMEN: I have read the **TIP TOP WEEKLY** for quite a while, and thought I would send my measurements and find out my weak points and the cure for them. Age, 14 years; height, 5 feet 1 inch; stripped, weight, 90 pounds; neck, 12½ inches; chest, normal, 28½ inches; expanded, 31 inches; waist, 25 inches; biceps, natural, 8 inches; contracted, 9 inches; forearm, 9 inches; wrists, 5½ inches; thigh, 15 inches; calves, 12 inches; ankles, 9 inches; shoulder, 13½ inches across. 1. How are my measurements? 2. What are my weak points? Good ones, if any? 3. How can I improve? 4. What am I built for best? Hoping to see this in print, I remain, yours,

R. D. R.

113 High Street, Newton, N. J.

You should take a course of gymnastics to round out your whole physique. What you need principally is larger chest development and an increase of weight. After you have reached your full growth and spent a few years in gymnasium work, you will be better able to determine what particular form of athletic exercise you are best fitted for.

PROF. FOURMEN: Would you please tell me how my measurements are? I am 5 feet 4 inches in height; weight, 124 pounds; chest, normal, 31½ inches; expanded, 34 inches; right calf, 12½ inches; left, 12½ inches; waist, 26½ inches; right bicep, 10 inches; expanded, 11 inches; left, 10 inches; expanded, 11 inches; right wrist, 7 inches; left, 7 inches; right ankle, 9 inches; left, 8¾ inches; neck, 12½ inches; across shoulders, 16 inches. An old reader of your famous weekly, **TIP TOP**. Give my best regards to B. L. Standish,

P. S.

Your measurements are good for a person of your height.

PROF. FOURMEN: Have been a constant reader of **TIP TOP WEEKLY** for some time. Would be greatly obliged if you would answer a few questions. I am 17 years old and weigh 145 pounds. Height, 5 feet 7 inches. I am a telegraph operator and

work nights, and don't take much exercise. Not because I cannot, but I do not really know what would be best for me in my condition. My heart troubles me a great deal; that is, when I indulge in any severe exercises. Could you tell me how I could remedy this? What hours during the day would you suggest as the best for my sleeping hours? Could you suggest some light exercise? My appetite is good. What should I eat? Can get out in the open air most any time I wish. Hoping to see this soon in print, I am,

A TIP TOP ADMIRER.

Marion, Ind.

If your heart is weak, avoid all heavy exercises. Brisk walks in the early morning air are beneficial. If you are a cigarette smoker you will find that the heart action will improve if you cease using tobacco in that form. Take some of the light exercises used in the United States army. They are simple and do not require any apparatus. Begin gradually and let your advancement in the work be governed by the manner in which they affect your heart. If it troubles you a great deal, consult a physician before indulging in these exercises. Eat only plain, wholesome food, but be sure it is well cooked. A generous supply of potatoes, beef, mutton, milk, vegetables, fruit and brown bread should largely make up your menu. Avoid pastry of all kinds, and do not drink strong tea or coffee.

PROF. FOURMEN: I have always longed to ask you these few questions, and at last I have scraped together enough courage to write and ask you these few questions. 1. What will make my right arm strong, so that I may become a good pitcher and have lots of speed? 2. After I run about one or two squares my heart beats and my sides beat as if I was going to die. What will cure me and make me become a good runner? Thanking you in advance, and I will also write again, sending you my measurements. I will be satisfied to see this in print. I am,

H. McCCLUNE.

Philadelphia, Pa.

1. To become a good pitcher it is necessary to constantly practice. But be careful of your right arm. A great many aspirants fail because they overdo their training.

2. If you find that running affects your heart, do not indulge in it.

PROF. FOURMEN: Being a constant reader of **TIP TOP**, I take the liberty of asking you a few questions. My measurements are: Chest, normal, 28 inches; contracted, 27 inches; expanded, 30 inches; waist, 26 inches; neck, 11½ inches; right arm, normal, 8½ inches; flexed, 9½ inches; left arm, normal, 8 inches; flexed, 9¼ inches; right forearm, 9 inches; left, 9 inches; wrist, 6 inches; thigh, 16 inches; right calf, 11½ inches; left, 11¼ inches; height, 5 feet 5¾ inches; weight, 101 pounds; age, 18 years. 1. How is my chest? How are my arms? I do not use any tobacco. 3. I ride a bicycle without getting winded, but get winded if I run much. How can I improve my wind? 4. Am I below the average, and how can I help myself? 5. I go to the local Y. M. C. A. gym, and there take a shower bath and a

plunge in the pool. Do you think this beneficial? 6. I have bronchial troubles. How can I get rid of them? Thanking you in advance, I remain, yours truly,

F. O. P.
Mobile, Ala.

You lack several pounds in weight, and consequently you are below the normal measurements of a boy your size. Continue your gymnasium work, but do not stay too long in the swimming pool after exercising. One plunge followed by a brisk rub down with a coarse Turkish towel, is sufficient. Otherwise the body will get chilled. The effect of such a course is to counteract the good results of the exercise in the gymnasium just previous to taking the bath. If you are severely troubled with bronchial affection, do not delay in seeking the advice of a physician.

PROF. FOURMEN: Being a constant reader of the TIP TOP, I would like you to answer these questions. Age, 12 years; weight, 85 pounds; height, 4 feet 9 inches; chest, 26½ inches; expanded, 29 inches; waist, 28 inches; neck, 12 inches; wrist, 6 inches; ankles, 8 inches. 1. How are my measurements? 2. Where are my weak points, and how can I strengthen them? 3. I pitch in my baseball team and play quarter in my football team. Are these good positions for exercise? 4. What can I do to be an all-around player in both these positions? 5. I play a cornet. Is this good to develop your lungs? Please put this in print. The boys call me Dick and a chum of mine Brad, because we fan them out with curves. Yours truly, R. D. H.

Andover, N. Y.

You are very well developed. I cannot discover any particularly weak points. Football and baseball are excellent as means of exercising all parts of the body. Practice every day if you want to become proficient in the positions you mention. Playing on any wind instrument is good to develop lung power.

PROF. FOURMEN: I have read the TIP TOP ever since I could read, and I take the liberty to ask you a few questions. I am 14 years old; height, 5 feet 5¼ inches; weight, stripped, 109 pounds; neck, 13 inches; chest, normal, 30½ inches; expanded, 33¾ inches; thighs, 18½ inches; calves, 12¾ inches; forearm, 8½ inches; waist, 28½ inches; shoulder to shoulder, 18 inches. I have won three medals: First, saving a girl from drowning; second, for swimming long distances, and received another medal for trick acrobatic work. I don't belong to any gym and never did. I play baseball, catch on the Hustlers, of New London, Conn. I have been a sailor for eight months, and still keep in training. I don't smoke. 1. Have I got a swelled head? 2. How is my weight? 3. How can I be a better swimmer? Yours very truly,

New London, Conn. J. T. F.

You should weigh a few pounds more. No, you haven't a swelled head, only a just pride in the knowledge that you have done and can do something that a great many people could not do if they tried. You are such a good swimmer that perhaps you do not need any particular instruction. However, I would advise you to continue your gymnastic work in some good gymnasium; you will have the use of apparatus not obtainable elsewhere.

PROF. FOURMEN: Over a year ago—the time your articles appeared in the back of TIP TOP on how to increase weight and build—I wrote you a letter. At that time I weighed 108 pounds and my height was 5 feet 5 inches. The following are my measurements, taken a month ago by a noted German professor in gymnastics in our college: Age, 16 years 6 months; height, 5 feet 7 inches; chest, natural, 33 inches; contracted, 31½ inches; expanded, 37 inches; biceps, natural—arm extended—11¼ inches; contracted, 12½ inches; wrist, 6½ inches; neck, 14 inches; forearm, 9¼ inches; shoulders—arms and upper chest—around, 43½ inches; reach—finger tip to tip—70 inches; thighs, 18¾ inches; calves, 14 inches; ankles, 8½ inches; waist, 28 inches; hips, 33 inches. 1. How can I increase the size of my thighs? I have a good spring. At school, in the gym, I've cleared fifty-eight inches, running high jump. 2. What is your opinion of me? My friends doubt my weight unless I convince them by

getting weighed. 3. I play baseball, sometimes pitching and sometimes covering first. Though I'm next to smallest on our last team, I've had the longest drives, but the least number. I hold the bat at the very end. Can you offer a few suggestions? 4. I also play football on Saturdays and basket ball twice a week, playing left end and forward, respectively. 5. Swimming is my greatest hobby. I use the side overhand stroke, lying on my right side. This way I can beat any fellow in our neighborhood four years my senior, but I can only keep it up about one hundred yards. Two months ago I attempted to swim to Delaware at the new bridge—the furthest south on the river—but I had to cut it short by swimming with the tide to Petty's—Paddy's—Island. Can you tell me how to strengthen the muscles used in that stroke? 6. I do not smoke, chew or drink—tea and coffee included—stopping when convinced by you I was doing wrong. What little I have gained I will unhesitatingly say was made by your instructions. I will express no more of my opinion of you, for I think you would be too modest to print it. With best wishes to you, Burt L. and Street & Smith, I am, your most ardent champion,

EDW. McCLELLAN.

Philadelphia, Pa.

Your letter makes very interesting reading. I am pleased to know that you followed the instructions faithfully which have been laid down from time to time for the guidance of all young men who realize the necessity of health culture as a means of increasing the joy of living. By following my advice and keeping steadily at the work, you have put your body in such fine condition that you feel a hundred per cent. more a man than you possibly could a year ago. The work has been slow, but the results justify your persevering efforts. Having given up injurious habits and led a regular life in accordance with common-sense rules, you feel brighter, more cheerful and more active, physically and mentally, than you imagined possible one year ago. The play has certainly been worth the candle, and you show by your letter that you realize the application of the proverb to your case. Now that you have developed a good physique, don't neglect it. It is like a complicated machine and must be constantly attended to if expected to be kept running in good order. So do not neglect your training.

Bicycle work will increase the size of your thighs. For the development of your arms, to increase the power of your swimming stroke, use pulley weights ten minutes in the morning and exercise with them the same period in the evening.

PROF. FOURMEN: As I am a constant reader of the TIP TOP, I take the liberty to ask you a few questions. My age is 13 years; weight, 107 pounds; height, 4 feet 11 inches; waist, 32 inches; chest, normal, 30 inches; expanded, 31½ inches. 1. How are my measurements? 2. What are my strong points, if I have any? 3. Weak ones? 4. How can I reduce my weight? 5. How can I grow taller? I can pitch for seven innings, then I give out. 6. How can I be able to pitch a full game? Thanking you in advance, I remain,

W. V. O. M.

Brooklyn, N. Y.

You are a very "chunky" lad, and have an unusually large chest for one of your height. I can discover no weak points in your build. As for growing taller, remember that you are only thirteen years old, and have till your twenty-first year before you get your full growth. Perhaps you have strained your arm in pitching and weakened the muscles. A long rest this winter will probably put you in shape again next spring.

"GOLDEN HOURS."

Boys, have you any old numbers of Golden Hours? If so, see what numbers are among them and write me, stating price. I will pay liberally to complete my files. Address WILLIAMS, Station "O," Box 24 New York City.

TIP TOP WEEKLY

CAUTION!

All readers of the Renowned Tip Top stories should beware of base imitations, placed upon the market under catch names very similar to Frank Merriwell, and intended to deceive.

- 463—Frank Merriwell Blizzard Bound; or, After Big Game in the Rockies.
464—Frank Merriwell Captured; or, Trouble in the Black Timbers.
465—Dick Merriwell in Damascus; or, The Sword of the Sheik.
466—Dick Merriwell on the Desert; or, Captives of the Bedouins.
467—Dick Merriwell in Egypt; or, The Encounter on the Nile.
468—Frank Merriwell's Fingers; or, The Man Who Came Back.
469—Frank Merriwell's Retaliation; or, The Clash in California.
470—Frank Merriwell in 'Frisco; or, The "Go" at the Golden Gate.
471—Frank Merriwell's "Dope Ball"; or, The Wizard Twirler of Leland Stanford.
472—Frank Merriwell's Handicap; or, Hastings, The Hurdler from Humboldt.
473—Frank Merriwell's Red Challengers; or, The Hot Game with the Nebraska Indians.
474—Frank Merriwell's Fencing; or, For Sport or For Blood.
475—Frank Merriwell's Backer; or, Playing Baseball for a Fortune.
476—Frank Merriwell's Endurance; or, The Cross-Country Champions of America
477—Frank Merriwell in Form; or, Wolfers, the Wonder from Wisconsin.
478—Frank Merriwell's Method; or, The Secret of Becoming a Champion.
479—Frank Merriwell's Level Best; or, Cutting the Corners with a New Curve.
480—Frank Merriwell's I acrosse Team; or, The Great Hustle with Johns Hopkins.
481—Frank Merriwell's Great Day; or, The Crowning Triumph of His Career.
482—Dick Merriwell in Japan; or, Judo Art Against Jiu-Jitsu.
483—Dick Merriwell on the Rubber; or, Playing Baseball in the Flowery Kingdom.
484—Dick Merriwell's Cleverness; or, Showing the Japs the American Game.
485—Dick Merriwell in Manila; or, Papinta, the Pride of the Philippines.
486—Dick Merriwell Marooned; or, The Queen of Fire Island.
487—Dick Merriwell's Comrade; or, The Treasure of the Island.
488—Dick Merriwell, Gap-Stopper; or, A Surprise for the Surprisers.
489—Dick Merriwell's Sacrifice Hit; or, Winning by a Hair's Breadth.
490—Dick Merriwell's Support; or, Backed Up When Getting His Bumps.
491—Dick Merriwell's Stroke; or, Swimming for His Life.
492—Dick Merriwell Shadowed; or, The Search for the Lost Professor.
493—Dick Merriwell's Drive; or, Evening Up with His Enemy.
494—Dick Merriwell's Return; or, The Reappearance at Fardale.
495—Dick Merriwell's Restoration; or, Whipping the Team into Shape.
496—Dick Merriwell's Value; or, The Success of Square Sport.
497—Dick Merriwell's "Dukes"; or, His Fight with Himself.
498—Dick Merriwell's Drop-Kick; or, Chester Arlington's Team of Tigers.
499—Dick Merriwell's Defeat; or, How Arlington Won the Second Game.
500—Dick Merriwell's Chance; or, Taming the Tigers of Fairport.
501—Dick Merriwell's Stride; or, The Finish of the Cross Country Run.
502—Dick Merriwell's Wing-Shift; or, The Great Thanksgiving Day Game.
503—Dick Merriwell's Skates; or, Playing Ice Hockey for Every Point.
504—Dick Merriwell's Four Fists; or, The Champion of the Chanson.
505—Dick Merriwell's Dashing Game; or, The Fast Five from Fairport.

Back numbers may be had from all newsdealers or will be sent, postpaid, by the publishers upon receipt of price

5 CENTS

STREET & SMITH

PUBLISHERS

NEW YORK

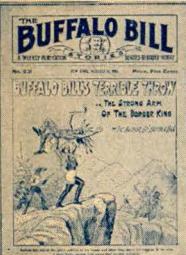
THE FAVORITE LIST OF FIVE-CENT LIBRARIES

TIP TOP WEEKLY



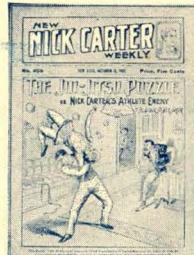
Frank and Dick Merriwell are two brothers whose adventures in college and on the athletic field are of intense interest to the American boy of to-day. They prove that a boy does not have to be a rowdy to have exciting sport.

Buffalo Bill Stories



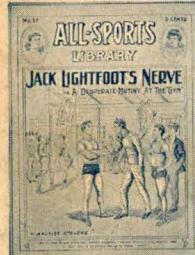
Buffalo Bill is the hero of a thousand exciting adventures among the Redskins. These are given to our boys only in the Buffalo Bill Stories. They are bound to interest and please you.

Nick Carter Weekly



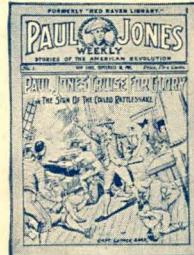
We know, boys, that there is no need of introducing to you Nicholas Carter, the greatest sleuth that ever lived. Every number containing the adventures of Nick Carter has a peculiar, but delightful, power of fascination.

All-Sports Library



All sports that boys are interested in, are carefully dealt with in the All-Sports Library. The stories deal with the adventures of plucky lads while indulging in healthy pastimes.

Paul Jones Weekly



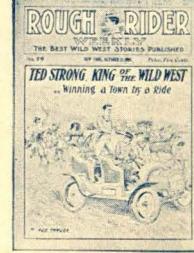
Do not think for a second, boys, that these stories are a lot of musty history, just sugar-coated. They are all new tales of exciting adventure on land and sea, in all of which boys of your own age took part.

Brave and Bold



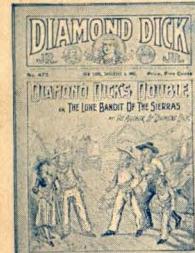
Every boy who prefers variety in his reading matter, ought to be a reader of Brave and Bold. All these were written by authors who are past masters in the art of telling boys' stories. Every tale is complete in itself.

Rough Rider Weekly



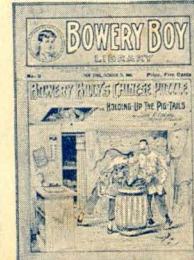
Ted Strong was appointed deputy marshal by accident, but he resolves to use his authority and rid his ranch of some very tough bullies. He does it in such a slick way that everyone calls him "King of the Wild West" and he certainly deserves his title.

Diamond Dick Weekly



The demand for stirring stories of Western adventure is admirably filled by this library. Every up-to-date boy ought to read just how law and order are established and maintained on our Western plains by Diamond Dick, Bertie, and Handsome Harry.

Bowery Boy Library



The adventures of a poor waif whose only name is "Bowery Billy." Billy is the true product of the streets of New York. No boy can read the tales of his trials without imbibing some of that resource and courage that makes the character of this homeless boy stand out so prominently.